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BLACKBUT COMELY.

BY

G.J.WHYTE MELVILLE.





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BLACK BUT COMELY.



BLACK BUT COMELY

OR,

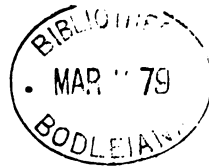
THE ADVENTURES OF JANE LEE.

BY

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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BLACK BUT COMELY;
OR,
THE ADVENTURES OF JANE LEE.

Book I.

CHAPTER I.

“NO SUCH CATCH!”

THE day had not yet gone by when murderers were hanged in public. Capital punishment still afforded the multitude opportunity to keep holiday, and combine with the excitement of a tragedy the refreshments and relaxation of a picnic. Therefore a pieman, selling his dainties “all hot,” did good business in the crowd round Newgate, and accepted with resignation — even thankfulness — the

judicial catastrophe that brought grist to his mill.

Why should he trouble himself about the culprit, a journeyman tailor, who had stabbed his wife in a fit of drunken ferocity, and been convicted on the evidence of his sister-in-law? He could not look along the whitewashed passages of the prison, nor into the bare blank cell, where the doomed man cowered and shook before that awful unknown to which he was gliding so smooth and swift and sure, upheld, it may be, for a moment at a time, by the presence of two robust turnkeys, who guarded him, as a timid passenger feels upheld in a storm by companionship with some stout skipper and his mate; yet now and again stung to agony at the contrast between their situation and his own. Would it have dulled the pie-man's enterprise, or the appetites of his customers, to see the gray drawn face, with the *hunted* look in its eyes—that most

pitiful of all expressions—by which a human soul appeals for help to God and man in vain ; to mark the twitching lip, the working fingers, the sinking dwindled figure, whereon those coarse clothes hung so loose and wide ; or to realise in their own minds what it must be to feel the absolute certainty—from which there is no escape—of being *there* in an hour ! fifty minutes ! three quarters ! How can the moments run so fast, yet fall distinct, and full, and merciless, each with its stab of mortal fear ?

It is a dull dim morning in October ; you might wonder so many inhabitants of the busiest capital in Europe can find time to come into the streets. Nevertheless, as the fatal hour approaches, the crowd thickens fast, so that our pleman finds himself jammed in a corner, whence there is not the faintest glimpse of the gallows, but where he is surrounded by spectators who seem less inclined

to stop their mouths with his pies than to enlarge discursively on crime, culprit, sentence, and general bearings of the case. Strange that the softer sex should form a large portion of this assemblage ; strange, too, that their sympathies seem rather with murderer than victim, and that the evidence of his sister-in-law should excite general reprobation and ill-will.

“Druv’ to it, no doubt,” observes a greasy slattern, in a shawl and bonnet literally shining with decay. “That aggerawated and put upon, as he didn’t scarce know whether he was dead or alive. Ah ! She was one with a tongue, *she* was. As would let you hear of it again—and again—and again !”

“It’s my belief as that there sister deserves hanging a precious sight more than *he* do,” replies a neighbour, stout and respectable-looking—a matron, indeed, whose

character would be unimpeachable but for drink. "I seen her myself on the trial. 'You're a nice one,' says I, 'with your clean white collar and your black gloves. It would be hard lines,' says I, 'for a man to swing along of a saucy, trapesing minx like *you!*'"

"It's a hanging matter, too, missis," proceeds a bricklayer in fustian, "when you come to knifin' on 'em. And I'm not sure but the law is right."

"Knifin'!" echoes a tall handsome woman, with the swarthy skin, soft black eyes, and clear-cut features of real gipsy blood. "I'd have knifed him first, I would! And so would you, my beauty," she continues in a loving whisper to the child sleeping on her bosom, whose dark lashes and small high-bred face denote no stolen offspring of the Gentiles, but a true little Romany of her own. Then, while she stretches her fine figure a-tiptoe, with her graceful head turned towards

the unseen gallows, she croons out a sweet-toned lullaby in her own strange tongue for the brown little lady in her arms, the "*rinkenî tawnî, Romany rawny,*" as she calls it, hushing and soothing her darling, lest it should wake before its time.

Even the pieman could not but admire this pair, so uncommon, so picturesque, and so comely withal; sleek and supple as a leopardess and her cub, with something of the wild-beast's watchful restlessness, half suspicious, half defiant, its lithe and easy movements, its sinewy, shapely form.

But soon the crowd began to sway in that resistless ebb and flow, against which, as constituting the danger of an undisciplined multitude, wooden barriers had been erected, and other municipal precautions taken in vain. At or near the gallows, something of unusual interest seemed to have occurred. A seething wave of humanity, that gathered

strength and volume as it rolled in, lifting the pieman off his feet, dashed him with his portable oven to the ground. Its lid flew open, and the dregs of a London mob were soon scrambling for the contents. Such a struggle caused more crowding, more curiosity, more confusion. Women began to scream and faint; strong men, in the instinct of self-preservation, took cruel advantage of their strength, and enhanced by their cowardice the helplessness of the weak. Human beings in a panic are like beasts in a stampede. Those who have once gone down get little chance of coming to the surface again. The pieman, hurled against the gipsy, bore her to the earth. Even as she fell, rose another of those swelling, suffocating surges, that seemed to dash her life out, as a wave dashes a morsel of seaweed against the rock. Blind, pinioned, choking for breath, brain and senses failing in her death-struggle, the

brave instinct of maternity conquered all. The beautiful gipsy, with one last despairing effort, flung her child into the woman's arms who, crushed herself, was helplessly crushing her down, and so floated away into the unknown, with the familiar wail of a waking infant in her ears, and the little face she loved stamped on eyes that were never to brighten with earthly joys, nor fill with earthly tears again.

But the other woman, *like* a woman, strained every nerve to save the baby. Catching it with the frantic effort of a wild-cat, rather than a seamstress, she passed the precious charge to a neighbour, as she herself failed and succumbed. Again was the child held aloft, when she who had taken it seemed perishing; and so it came about that, changing hands half a score of times, the little gipsy found rest at last in the arms of a thick-set, swarthy, well-dressed

man, and was saved. He contrived, by sheer strength, to keep his feet and preserve the infant unhurt, till he gained a lamp-post, and, passing his arm round it, steadied himself for fresh efforts when he should have recovered breath. Fortune so far favoured him, that the pressure of the crowd began to take another direction, and, with space to gasp for air, he was able to look at the helpless little mite of humanity thus committed to his charge.

“Well, this is a go!” he muttered, scanning the dark brows and lashes, the pretty waxen features, the tiny well-shaped hands of his new acquisition, with a strong idea of leaving it at once in the nearest work-house; but the child clasping him round the neck, and nestling closer to his breast, with a smile, he added: “Dash it, little ’un, you *are* a beauty; I’ll take you home with me, as sure as my name’s Jack Lopez!”

CHAPTER II.

JACK LOPEZ.

HAD it been Abraham, Simeon, Mordecai, Haman even! But why *Jack* Lopez? Jew was written clearly on his rich dark complexion, his blue-black hair, his fleshy aquiline nose, his full curved lips, and the smooth proportions of his round, well-turned form. His clothes were far too glossy for a Christian's everyday wear, and a certain Oriental taste for magnificence was apparent in the profusion of jewellery that he seemed to carry as a matter-of-course, even on such an occasion, and that, strange to say, he brought with him untouched out of the scramble. Only a Jew could have preserved the polish

of his boots, the lustre of his hat, through the "free fight" in which he had been engaged; only a Jew would have recovered so speedily the self-possession he lost during the urgency of such bodily peril as he was forced to undergo.

Yes, Jack Lopez was as much a Jew as Josephus; but there was a soft place in his heart, and the little waif he had rescued from destruction crept in to nestle there for evermore. These people have strong affections, though confined to a narrow circle, concentrated on their own kindred, their own families, their own homes. So long as they are mere acquaintances, why should the Jew do more for the Christian than the Christian does for the Jew? But once make Shylock your friend, and he will stick to you closer than a brother, will invite you to his house, welcome you to his family, give you his counsel and his confidence, nay, will even


lend you money at a reasonable interest, and, believing in your integrity, Christian though you call yourself, will trust you in all honour with his "ducats and his daughter!"

Jack Lopez, a little ashamed of himself, and earnestly hoping that he might not meet an acquaintance, gained the outskirts of the crowd, leaped into a hansom cab with his charge, who clasped her little hand round his forefinger, and so, not without certain misgivings as to his reception, proceeded rapidly home.

"Why, Jack, you must be mad!"

"As mad as a hatter, I think," replied Jack, showing the boldest front he dared. "It's done, Bell, and there's an end of it; we can't turn the poor little devil into the street!"

He was no fool, and laid the infant in his wife's arms, reflecting that, in all matters connected with babes and sucklings, the



sense of touch goes straight to a woman's heart.


Mrs. Lopez, rocking it to and fro as you have seen a young person of six rock her doll, looked over its black head into her husband's face with a comical expression of expectation, suspicion, and surprise.

She was a fair florid woman, who desired above all things to have children of her own, but, after many years of marriage, had not attained her wish. She fell violently in love with Jack Lopez while yet a boarding-school miss at Putney; married him before she was out of her teens; shared with him the hardships of bad times, bad business, and bad management; nay, sold cigars for him, over a counter, at fourpence apiece; and finally, when certain desperate ventures, and a few judicious advances to minors at sixty per cent., made a rich man of him, worried her Jack considerably with aspirations for promotion in

the social sphere—"West-end airs," as he called them—a longing for fashionable society, and even vague hints as to the possibility of presentation at Court.

This couple, differing in character as in outward appearance, rubbed on nevertheless comfortably enough. Jack went to business morning after morning from his pleasant house in Tyburnia, and returned, or not, to an excellent dinner, as suited him best; nor did "Bell" demand any account of his absence. They say that, if you tell a woman such a thing is "made by machinery," she asks no further explanation; and, similarly, it seems to me, that wives accept the term "business" as a sufficient excuse for unlimited furlough, dreading, perhaps, the strain on their faculties that an investigation of all conveyed by that comprehensive word would impose.

So Jack got rounder and sleeker, and fonder of the good things of life year by



year; while Mrs. Lopez grew redder of cheeks, yellower of hair, portlier of form, and more hopeless of children day by day. Each thought the other "a good deal altered," wondering, perhaps, why they had ever married all those years ago, by no means exulting in their union, yet not exactly wishing they had let it alone. Do you think Mrs. Anderson really admired old John's scanty locks when they were "like the snow," casting never a thought back to the "Joes" with other surnames of her youthful days, and wondering whether or not she had missed the great prize of life? When I see a venerable couple more than usually affectionate, I respect them no less for rectitude of principle than sound common sense. I am persuaded they are making the best of it, and quite right too. Is not substance preferable to shadow; a waking reality to the impossible illusions of a dream?

And yet, while we pass to leeward of a bean-field on a summer's evening, what makes the hardest of us sigh to scent its faint sweet fragrance, that wakes but does not satisfy the senses, recalling certain foolish longings, we ought long ago to have forgotten, for the forbidden, the indefinite, and the unknown?

Jack Lopez and his wife lived habitually in that condition of easy comfort and even luxury which is common amongst Londoners of our time, in the well-to-do middle class; with only a page to wait at dinner, there was champagne on the table every day. Mrs. Lopez, though satisfied to sit in her brougham behind a single horse, felt no hesitation in spending a guinea on a bouquet, and two on a stall at the opera, whenever she had a fancy for music or flowers. Jack could hardly cross the street but in a hansom cab, and spent a younger brother's income on the dinners

alone to which he treated himself at Richmond and Greenwich during the summer months. Both went to Dieppe every autumn; and it was only lamentable incapacity for handling a gun, though his eye was accurate enough on a billiard-table, that prevented Mr. Lopez from renting an expensive villa, with five hundred acres of shooting, in Surrey. "Light come, light go," is a true proverb in money matters. When a man can make two or three hundred by his business in a morning, he soon acquires profuse habits of domestic expenditure. His household accounts are lumped in with the losses of trade, his pleasures come out of its profits. Living from hand to mouth is capital fun, so long as there is plenty in both; and when the rainy day does come, why, after all, like one who has to return a borrowed umbrella, he is in no worse plight than at first.

The speculator who "began life without

a shilling," leaves off perhaps in the same predicament; but he places to the credit of his account with Fortune the five, ten, even twenty years that he has been spending in luxury, and is not wholly dissatisfied with the result.

"She's a sweet little thing, Jack," said Mrs. Lopez, after the infant had lain in her arms for about half a minute. "There's not many wives, my dear, would take a ready-made baby like this, with such a black little poll, and ask no questions. But, there, when I say a thing I mean it; and she might have a worse mummy, mightn't she? and a worse home? Oh Jack, she's opened her eyes, I declare! What a duck it is!"

When her husband returned from business, bringing to dinner a friend the exact counterpart of himself, an extra bottle of champagne was drunk in honour of the new inmate of the household. It afforded an engrossing

topic of conversation from the soup (turtle) to the dessert (pines); but when coffee was served, and the men began to smoke, Mrs. Lopez, who had not retired, because after coffee came curaçoa, suddenly remembered a difficulty that, strange to say, occurred to none of them before.

“My gracious me!” she exclaimed, looking hazily round, “I don’t suppose the child has ever been christened; and if it has, I don’t know its name no more than the dead. There’s a J. L., in tiny blue letters, printed on its little arm below the elbow, but that’s no clue at all.”

“Vaccination,” observed Jack, sententiously, between the puffs of his cigar.

His wife darted an indignant glance at him, and the friend, who was a person of resource, observed thoughtfully:

“J. L., ah, I see! Why not call it Jael?”

This remark was received with no more favour than its predecessor.

“Nonsense, Mr. Samuel,” returned the lady; “might as well call it Sisera!”

The friend smoked and pondered. Perhaps he too was not insensible to certain memories of the bean-field we mentioned even now.

“What should you say to Jane Lee?” he asked. “It’s short, simple, and to the purpose.”

“Not much to the purpose,” answered Mrs. Lopez; “but perhaps it will do as well as another. Jane Lee. It sounds respectable, and it’s a good travelling name enough. I’ll run upstairs now and see if the darling is asleep!”

CHAPTER III.

A BLACK OUZEL.

AT five, pretty Jane Lee was the pet of every servant, visitor, and guest in the household, no less than of Jack Lopez and his wife. Sleek, playful, active as a kitten, an indefatigable romp, and a confirmed flirt; the child, to use their own expression, "had a way with it" that neither male nor female could resist. The clear-cut little face sparkled with fun, the large dark eyes shone with intelligence. The gipsy elf learned her letters almost as fast as she looked at them, and caught up the street cries outside with a readiness of imitation that denoted much power of mimicry and a correct ear. Jack Lopez was

persuaded that he could provide no better after-dinner amusement for his friends than to stand his adopted daughter on the table, behind the decanters, and bid her go through her performances one by one, from the early milkman to the boy with the evening beer. His guests, men who looked habitually to the main chance, decided that he meant to leave her all he possessed, and Jack, they opined, would "cut up well" when his time came.

At ten, the dark-eyed little maid seemed generally recognised as a chief ornament of the house. Master could not bear her out of his sight, mistress treated her as a child of her own, assuming, indeed, certain honours of maternity on the strength of her treasure, while the servants flattered her beauty, encouraged her whims, and strengthened her evil propensities to the utmost of their power.

Jack, who knew his own affairs well enough, spared no expense to give her a good educa-

tion. Little Miss Lee might be seen, accompanied by a maid-servant, passing to and from a young ladies' day-school in Bayswater, where she surpassed her class-fellows in quickness and proficiency, no less than in repartee, agility, mischief, and general insubordination. Though rather too slim and angular, she was still an exceedingly pretty child. Even in London strangers would turn round to admire her large dark eyes, coal-black hair, clear-cut features, lithe willowy shape, straight limbs, and the light tread of those slim supple feet.

A duchess once stopped in Kensington Gardens to ask the maid who she was, and calling her "a handsome little gipsy," while she bent down to bestow a patrician kiss, scarcely guessed how exactly she had hit the mark. To gipsy blood she owed her health, vitality, grace, beauty, and the wild turbulent instincts that made all the troubles of her after-life.

Music and languages she acquired with little effort. In history and geography she slurred her lessons over as well as another. Drawing, no physiognomist, warned by the want of curve in those delicate rectilinear eyebrows, would have wasted time by endeavouring to teach ; while dancing, again, seemed as natural to that airy floating figure as flying to a bird—so that for waltz, gavotte, and cachucha, she never failed to carry off the half-yearly prize. Her ready brain was accurate in arithmetic, her supple fingers seemed no less clever with the needle than the pen ; but of all the girl's triumphs over her class-mates, those earned in their singing lessons seemed the easiest and the most complete.

Full and clear in its tone, the young voice had something so wild, sad, and tender in its expression, that listeners of mature age and unexampled austerity, such as the French teacher, a tough Swiss Protestant, or the

experienced person who took charge of the linen, were fain to look out at window and wipe away their tears.

Jack Lopez, dreaming over his cigar after dinner, loved to speculate on his adopted child's proficiency in song.

"A good engagement," he reflected, "means a pot of money, particularly when they're handsome into the bargain. Why shouldn't this black little rogue of mine come out as a tip-topper one of these days and take the town by storm? Ah! stranger things have happened. I've had some queerish ups and downs myself. Yes; there's an opening if one can hit it, and I should like to see her with a brougham and pair before I die!"

Then he would walk up and down the room, smoking fiercely and buried in calculation; for with this man pounds, shillings, and pence necessarily entered into every relation of life. Like Midas, the flavour of all he ate

and drank seemed tainted with a smack of gold!

His wife, on the other hand, was little given to speculation, seldom looking forward, indeed, beyond the immediate future, as afforded in the prospect of luncheon and dinner. Fat, contented, and comatose, it needed slight medical knowledge to predict she would be summoned to start for the great journey at inconveniently short notice; and perhaps, with so full a habit, so drooping an eye, and so florid a complexion, she was wise to take no thought for difficulties she might not live to encounter, and troubles that would pass harmlessly overhead, when she was laid in the grave.

So long as pretty Jane's light step was heard dancing on the stairs, her clear voice carolling like a bird in hall and passage, Mrs. Lopez felt satisfied all was well, and left the future, under Jack's supervision, to provide for

itself. So year after year stole by, till one bright spring morning, when he had been gone to business about an hour, the maid, taking breakfast to his wife's bedroom, screamed out loud, and dropped her tray with a crash on the floor. Her mistress was as dead as Queen Anne. The doctor, pocketing his lancets, shook his head, and muttered "Apoplexy." Mr. Lopez was sent for from his office, and Jane from her school; the blinds were drawn; the servants spoke in whispers; a funeral with three mourning coaches paced from the door; and the household went into decent black.

These things are a mere question of time. The memory of Cleopatra may have kept fresh for six months. Mrs. Lopez was forgotten in six weeks, and before the year was out neighbours began to wonder whether Jack would marry again.

Miss Lee was sitting opposite him after

dinner. She took the top of the table now, and now for the first time it struck him how self-possessed she had grown in manner, how womanly in figure and face.

“Jane,” said he, “ring for coffee, my dear, and hand me a light. Why, how you grow, child! I never thought you meant to be so tall.”

She glanced at her own shapely figure in the mirror and smiled.

“I’m the tallest girl in the school now,” she answered, “and the eldest, and, I’m afraid, the wickedest. It’s not *my* fault, Miss Quilter says, but yours, dear. I’ve been so spoilt at home!”

Jack filled his glass. He was bracing his nerves—“hinge-ing himself up,” as he called it—for an effort.

“How old *are* you, my dear?” he asked, with rather a shaky voice. “I’m sure I forget.”

“That’s not at all a pretty question,” she answered laughing; “and if *you* forget I don’t see why I should remember; but according to my own reckoning I was nineteen last birthday. I’m sure that’s old enough for anything!”

He pondered with his hand on the decanter. The day he brought her home from before Newgate had hitherto been kept as the anniversary of her birth. Could she really be almost twenty? How old he was getting, and how quickly time passed!

“Janey, would you like to go away from here?”

He dreaded some natural burst of regret, even resentment, yet her answer caused him less relief than disappointment.

“Of course I should! I am so fond of change. I should like never to sleep two nights in the same bed.”

“I shall miss you,” he faltered.

“ Oh yes ! I am sure of that ; you’re very fond of me, I know ; but can’t you be just as fond of me when I’m away ? ”

A shadow as of pain crossed his face, while he emptied his glass at a gulp.

“ I daresay I shall not forget you,” he continued. “ Well, Janey, we can’t all do as we like in this world—that’s to say, unless we’re enormously rich. My dear, I have made up my mind to send you into the country for a whole year.”

“ The country ! what country ? ” she asked, looking rather disconcerted. “ Suppose I don’t like it when I get there ? ”

“ If you don’t like it, dear, you need only say so. I’ve done my duty by you as if you had been my own. If you’re not happy in the country, I’ll have you back in town. But, Janey, this is a world of uncertainty, particularly in the present state of the money-market. Don’t you lose a chance, my girl,

if it comes in your way. I'm a good life enough, I hope, but you must remember there's nobody to look after you when I'm gone!"

By this it may be guessed that Jack Lopez, like many other people, entrusted those dependent on him to the care of Providence, with a reliance that, applied to his own case, would have been beyond all praise.

Jane Lee, brushing her long black hair before the glass on her dressing-table, took these things seriously to heart.

"I'm not *his* child, I know," she reflected, smiling at the swarthy beauty opposite, whose white teeth gleamed, and black eyes sparkled, as she smiled back in return. "How surprised I was the first time he told me! I wonder whose child I *am*! I wonder whether I take after papa or mamma! I wonder if I shall like these people I'm going to next week!

What's the use of wondering? There's no end to it. I'm not to throw a chance away, he said. Does he mean I'm to marry the first man that asks me? Girls always marry before they're twenty, I suppose, and I'm past nineteen now. I don't know that I should mind it so much; but he *must* be handsome, and he *must* let me do as I like!"

Now Jack Lopez had only made up his mind to part with his treasure after much consideration. She had been ailing a little lately, and a clever doctor, who entrusted Jack with his money speculations, had given him an opinion—without a fee—to the effect that she ought to have a good twelve months of country air and quiet, in order to insure the strength of voice and constitution promised by her fine organisation, if it had fair play.

At twenty her guardian determined she should go to Italy, for the best teaching

afforded by the best school of music in the world. Long before she was thirty, he reckoned on her climbing the very top of the tree. "With engagements in London, Vienna, and St. Petersburg," thought Jack, "she will be independent of fortune, and my business may go to the devil—as I often think it must—and welcome, as far as *she* is concerned!"

So he answered an advertisement from a clergyman in Somersetshire, and made arrangements for the board and lodging of Miss Lee, as entitled by this contract to share the amusements and advantages of a liberal establishment and an elegant home.

CHAPTER IV.

MERVYN STRANGE.

WE do not think it necessary to accompany our young lady in her journey on the Great Western Railway, enlivened, as it could not fail to be, by the polite attentions of her fellow-passengers, a good-looking young gentleman who got out at Swindon, and an elderly white-whiskered personage going "through" to Barnstaple. If she felt a little lonely when Jack, waving his disconsolate farewell from the platform at Paddington, glided out of sight, the change of scene, rapid motion, pleasant country, and civilities of her companions soon cheered her up. When the train stopped at Reading, she would

not have gone back if she could. And yet the girl was less unfeeling than impressionable; not hard of heart, only young and thoughtless, exulting in her enfranchisement from the trammels of everyday life, roused by a sense of coming adventure, and conscious of that self-reliant spirit which sustains the most inexperienced of birds, when first they leave their nests to soar unaided on the wing.

Poor Jack, who could not face a mouthful of luncheon, was smoking cigars and drinking sherry sadly enough in his office, while Miss Lee disposed of a packet of sandwiches, two Banbury cakes, and a large cup of coffee at Swindon, with the healthy appetite of nineteen.

These refreshments sustained her quite comfortably till she reached the end of her journey—a small station with one porter, no waiting-room, and time-bills of every line in the kingdom but its own. Here she bade

a gracious good-bye to the white-whiskered person, who, hastening home to wife and family, was nevertheless so fascinated by the charms of her appearance and conversation, that he peeped surreptitiously at her luggage to ascertain her name. Then she put her handsome face out of the window, to the utter bewilderment of the rural station-master, and asked if there was anybody waiting for Miss Lee.

“Miss Lee!” echoed a deep voice; and a pale man, with his hand on the carriage-door, reverentially added, in mournful tones: “I beg your pardon, are you Miss Lee?”

“Yes, I am. You needn’t beg my pardon,” answered the girl, with a little laugh, as of a mocking spirit held decently in check. “I’ve two boxes, please, in the guard’s van, and a hamper, and a dressing-case in the carriage — you’ll find it under the seat — and the basket up there, and the wraps down here,

and those books, and some newspapers, and my umbrella, and—I think that's all."

While he hunted up these various effects, nor, strange to say, congratulated himself while so doing that he was still a bachelor, she took a good look at him, and wondered privately whether this could be the clergyman in whose society she was to share "the amusements and advantages of a liberal establishment and an elegant home."

Handsome?—No. Ugly?—Certainly not. Tall, thin, clean-shaved, with pale clear-cut features, and dark close-cropped hair, he looked, and indeed liked to look, the character he professed—something approaching an ideal monk of the Middle Ages, as far removed from the roystering friar of our English ballads as from the proud ambitious churchman of our English history. Admitting, rather than boasting, that he was a Protestant, he covertly admired the temporal supremacy affected by

Rome ; and declared openly that, for organisation and discipline, the Jesuits were the most efficient body of servants employed by any religion in the world. He could have borne, perhaps inflicted, martyrdom ; would have rejoiced in self-imposed penance, however irksome ; exulted in priestly ascendancy, however absolute ; but could hardly have sat down to such an occupation as tent-making, for instance, labouring with his hands, like an honest citizen, while he showed his fellow-citizens the way to a better world by doing their duty humbly, reverently, and simply in this.

Entangled in a lady's luggage on the platform of a railway station, he felt thoroughly out of place, yet he seemed to have a liking for the job, and no disinclination to take the orders of his employer.

“Did you come on purpose to meet me ?” said she, when boxes, hamper, and

etceteras had been collected and placed on a truck. "I expected to see somebody quite different; but I suppose it's all right, and you're Mr. Tregarthen, of Combe-Appleton? How far is it to the rectory?"

He blushed and laughed—a faint blush, a weak nervous little laugh. "You're mistaken, Miss Lee. My name is Strange—Mervyn Strange—at your service. I am Mr. Tregarthen's curate. He couldn't meet you himself, so deputed me to receive you at the station, and put you into the carriage. It's not more than five miles. You'll be there in plenty of time for dinner."

"Ain't you coming with me?" asked the girl, and wondered why he seemed so disturbed at the simple question; but though she drove through some of the loveliest scenery in the West of England, and that is no small word, she found herself thinking more of Mervyn Strange's abrupt jerky

manner, and thin eager face, than of wood and water, hill and dale, hedges and coppice, variegated meadows, scented blossom-raining orchards, all the summer beauties of the landscape through which she passed.

And the clergyman, walking fast, as was his habit, with long even strides, in the track of her wheels, compared her with the few women of his limited experience, not, we may be sure, to her disadvantage—with his mother, a buxom dame of fifty, his cherry-cheeked sisters, a pretty flirting cousin, and a young person of the middle class, who in his Oxford days had interfered with his fancy, if not his heart. What was the difference between Miss Lee and these estimable people, that ranked her as it were in another order of creation? He could not describe nor analyse it, but felt rather than knew that in comparison with these, she seemed as the rose to a cabbage, or such nutritious vege-

table ; as a wild-bird to the plump, serious, gobbling, domestic fowl !

Was she beautiful? He could scarcely ask himself the question before his senses answered in a glowing affirmative. Beautiful in the most dangerous of all beauty, to men like him. The beauty of Circe in her teens ; of the siren and the mermaid, rather than the angel or the nymph. St. Anthony, perhaps, could have explained the temptation that lurks under such outward comeliness, its subtle nature, its insidious force, and the tenacity with which it fastens on a prey, grappling and dragging the victim down into depths from which there is no hope of rescue, till all has been lost that seemed worth while to save.

This gentleman's education had scarcely qualified him for the part he elected to play in the great drama of life. Sensitive, studious, and retiring, he had left his mother's

apron-strings to matriculate at a quiet college in Oxford, without passing through the intermediate ordeal of a public school, which, for a lad without brothers, who had lost his father in childhood, seems an indispensable course of training for the future. His abilities, too, were such as reap the sober rewards of the university, rather than command success in the bustling competition of the world. He was no cricketer nor oarsman; ignored boxing-gloves, foils, and dumb-bells; could neither have leapt a hurdle himself, nor ridden a horse over it to save his life. But he was man enough to study ten hours on a stretch; and as for pluck, he had the courage of his opinions—a kind of valour more rare among youths than is generally supposed. Identifying himself with a party, whose aim seemed the reformation of our reformed church back to its original stem, he was conspicuous, even while an undergraduate, for the stiffness of

his circular collar, the austerity of his black-silk waistcoat, and the inordinate length of his frock-coat. He affected, indeed, a gravity of deportment that the eight mistook for hypochondriasis, and the eleven for hypocrisy; but the man was in earnest, and proved it; for he lived on a crust, and imbibed knowledge from a lecture, while to the vulgar temptations of wine and women, senseless mirth, and unhallowed riot, he was adamant itself. To sum up all, he kept within his allowance, consumed no tobacco, played the pianoforte in his rooms, read hard, thought much, went in for honours, and took a second-class.

But hedge your garden as you will, the south wind steals through, with its insidious whisper and its perfume-laden breath. In "the High" was a music-seller's shop, behind its counter stood a fair handsome girl, with loving blue eyes, and soft brown hair, the

wisdom of the serpent, and, for aught I know, the innocence of the dove. Blake of Christ Church sustained a shrewd rebuff when he made her a proposal, after his kind; and Brazenose men had a tradition that Fred Milo, called in college "the Infant Hercules," from his strength of body and lamentable weakness of mind, would have married her, but that she simply and persistently refused him every time he asked. Miss Morris had her own ideas, probably, as to the material advantages of matrimony, and was capable enough, as these blue-eyed beauties generally are, of managing her own affairs; but she *did* take an interest in the pale student who bent his head so respectfully towards her own over the counter, and Mervyn Strange, had he but known it, might have succeeded where the would-be profligate and the simple-minded athlete signally failed.

He bought a great deal of music, never-

theless, and stinted himself in certain necessities of existence, to balance an outlay he could ill afford. He liked to pass the shop, too, in his daily walks, and to feel his pulse beat faster as he turned the well-known corner, though retiring in sad confusion if she spied him from amongst her wares. His was obviously the faint heart that is said never to win fair lady ; but whatever Miss Morris thought she kept to herself, and if she wondered at the bashfulness that contrasted, perhaps favourably, with the daring of more importunate admirers, waited patiently to see what would come of it in course of time, say, by Valentine's Day. This little idyl was, however, prematurely stifled in the sudden departure and subsequent espousals of the damsel, who, summoned to nurse a married sister and family at a distance, all swollen out of knowledge by the mumps, quitted Oxford suddenly, and without leave-

taking. That she became the wife of a flourishing pork-butcher in Bicester, nearly as strong as Milo, and far more amusing than Blake, has nothing to do with my story, but explains why Strange took his walks henceforth in a different direction, and the High Street knew this pretty shopwoman no more.

It was only a scratch, but it taught him something. He felt that, like the heroes of antiquity, he too was vulnerable. Even insolent Achilles, he remembered, must go down if you knew where to hit him. The son of Atreus, as his "Horace" reminded him, in the midst of triumph was himself defeated by a captive maid, so why should Mervyn Strange of Pembroke escape the fate that overtook Ajax, Agamemnon, and that private gentleman in the Augustan age, who, under the name of Xanthias Phoceus, has achieved immortality, as an admirer of the scrubbing-brush and the hearth-broom?

No, he was at least capable of caring for a woman. Then came a thrill of pride and pleasure with the consciousness, none the less keen that he felt the danger of such weakness. A man of his views and temperament, when he took orders, he had thought to rid himself of the softer fancies once for all. God forbid they should assail him even in a dream, for the true priest, in his opinion, should own allegiance to but two superiors, two interests—his Master in heaven, his Order on earth; the cure of souls committed to him by her authority, and the temporal, no less than the spiritual, aggrandisement of his Church.

He could have argued for an hour on the celibacy of the clergy, inferring rather than asserting it was enjoined by the Scriptures; but insisting vehemently on its decency, its expediency, the beautiful example it afforded of self-sacrifice and self-renunciation. A priest, he would declare, is a soldier of the noblest

service the mind can conceive. Always in the presence of the enemy, his harness must be stainless, his weapons sharp and ready for immediate use; above all, must he keep himself unimpeded by such heavy baggage as conjugal love, parental anxiety, or the exactions of domestic affection. He must be prepared to march at a moment's notice, wherever his duty summons him, acknowledging no other claim, and listening only for the trumpet that calls him into action. Such were this enthusiast's views as to the requirements of his calling, such was his interpretation of the vows he took when ordained; yet could a glance from a pair of black eyes, a sentence spoken in a merry mocking girlish voice, render him thoroughly uncomfortable and unsettled, harassing his imagination, vexing his conscience, confusing his principles, prejudices, and professions in harsh and hopeless discord, "like sweet bells jangled out of tune."

CHAPTER V.

COMBE-APPLETON.

“LIKE master like man,” thought Jane Lee, as the primitive country-built fly grated and creaked down a steep hill into the clean little village of Combe-Appleton. “I wonder whether the proverb holds good with rectors and curates. I wonder what a Somersetshire parson’s wife is like—I never saw one—I wonder which of us will most astonish the other. It seems as if *my* wonders would never cease. But here we are. This *must* be the rectory. What a funny little house! and oh, what a lovely garden!” The driver, a ruddy-faced person, in cotton gloves, with silver lace round his hat, rang a bell under

the low-roofed creeper-grown porch, which was answered by a smiling maid-servant, dropping curtseys with every second word, who ushered the new arrival into a comfortable room, half-study half-boudoir, that opened on the entrance-hall.

“Missus will be down immediate, and I was to bring the tea in at once,” said the maid, and vanished, leaving our young lady at liberty to take a survey of her new home.

There were book-shelves and books in them. Sermons by the Rev. Silas Tregarthen. There was an engraving above the pianoforte—the Rev. Silas Tregarthen in full canonicals. There was a stand with a photograph—again the Rev. Silas Tregarthen. “He’s not the least like Mr. Strange,” thought Jane Lee, but just then the door opened to admit a full-blown comely woman, of a certain age, who walked in with outstretched hands and

an assured step, such as became the mistress of the house, and denoted she could be none other than the wife of the Rev. Silas Tregarthen.

“My dear, I’m so glad to see you. We got your pa’s letter—Mr. Lopez, I mean—and we’ve been expecting you all day. No ceremony, I entreat. Take your bonnet off here, while they’re unpacking your box upstairs, and have your tea comfortable. You’ll enjoy it after your ride. The rector—that’s Mr. Tregarthen, my husband, you know—was so vexed he couldn’t go to meet you. He sent his curate instead. I hope you didn’t miss each other. Mr. Strange makes such mistakes sometimes. What did you think of him? Here comes the tea; you must be famished, my dear. Won’t you like something substantial with it?”

So one poured and talked, the other drank and listened; each lady taking in,

with covert glances, the dress, accoutrements, and general calibre, as it were, of her new acquaintance, forming the while a mental estimate, not too flattering, of the *tout ensemble*. "Fat, vulgar, ignorant, and good-natured," thought the visitor; "older by ten years than she looks, feels, or wants to be thought; dress Bridgewater, manners Putney. Considered to have made a catch when she married the rector, a hundred years ago. Jealous of him, no doubt, to this day. I shall manage her well enough, but she will bore me, I feel. Never mind, I came down here to be bored, and get strong. If it's very tiresome, I'll write home, and Mr. L—— will be only too glad to have me back." Since she knew he was not her real father, she always called Jack Lopez, Mr. L——, and could turn him round her finger, by that or any other name, with perfect skill and success. Mrs. Tregarthen's conclusions were

less decided, her thoughts more perplexed. They ran somewhat in this wise :

“Too dark for my taste, and as bold as brass, in spite of her airs and graces. Yet it's curious how men admire that forward kind of girl. I wonder what Silas will think of her! I wish she hadn't come, but now that she is here one must make the best of it. An orphan too! My heart warms to any orphan. She'd do nicely for Mervyn Strange, if he took a fancy to her. There are many objections, though, to a married curate. And most likely she's looking her best now, with the excitement of the journey, the flush and the hurry, and one thing and another. I daresay she won't be half as handsome to-morrow.”

Assuming, perhaps hoping, such might be the case, Mrs. Tregarthen showed her visitor into a pretty little bedroom, with honeysuckles peeping in at the window, and

there left her to prepare for dinner, after the following caution :

“ You needn't make yourself very smart, my dear. There's nobody but ourselves, unless young Paravant should drop in, from Combe-Wester. An old pupil of my husband's, he's quite at home here, and as likely as not to come without dressing at all.”

Such a contingency, so expressed, seemed startling enough, but it set Jane Lee thinking ; and she certainly bestowed more care on her toilet than seemed absolutely required by the occasion, particularly to meet this unceremonious guest.

In white, relieved by a scarlet ribbon at her breast, a scarlet flower in her bright black hair, even Mrs. Tregarthen, with a mental reservation that she did not admire the style, was forced to admit she had seldom seen so striking a person as Jane Lee. Her husband, a puffy pompous personage, absurdly

like his own picture hanging opposite, was simply staggered, and murmured some unintelligible words of welcome as he took her in to dinner, very different from the rounded sentences he had prepared in his drive home from attending the bishop at a neighbouring rectory. To give him his due, Mr. Tregarthen was a man of overpowering eloquence with a pen in his fingers and a sheet or two of foolscap before him. His best extempore efforts, so surprising to his admirers, had been learnt by heart, with plenty of time to think them over. Nobody was more ready at an impromptu, but, like many orators of wider fame, he could not swim without corks, and was all abroad if the voluminous notes he prepared were forgotten or mislaid.

The party had scarce unfolded their napkins when a shadow passed the window, and a bell was heard to ring at the garden door.

“I told you so,” said Mrs. Tregarthen, looking round in triumph, as a young man entered the room unannounced, to take his seat at the table, with the less ceremony that a place had been laid for him, and he seemed to be expected as a matter-of-course.

“Mr. Paravant, Miss Lee;” the lady half-rose, the gentleman made a bow, and their introduction was complete.

While a neat-looking, neat-handed parlour-maid waited on this party of four, dispensing soup and fish, cruets and sauces, with the utmost attention possible, and the least noise, those whom she served were stealing at each other glances of curiosity and interest, not devoid, on Miss Lee’s part at least, of amusement and surprise. Mr. Tregarthen could not take his eyes off the attractive young lady who had that day arrived by rail and fly to share his home. Mrs. Tregarthen,

watching her husband as a cat watches a mouse, seemed to express in her whole deportment, from the restless hands and eyelids to the quiver of gaudy ribbons that adorned her head-dress, "I should like to catch you at it!" Mr. Paravant was admiring, in a preoccupied, uneasy kind of way, the handsome girl who seemed to have dropped from the clouds into this Somersetshire village for his especial subjugation; while Jane Lee, kneading her bread thoughtfully between her white fingers, speculated as to who he was, what he was, why he seemed thus to come and go unquestioned, and whether he too — with the same privileges as her own — was "to be treated in every respect like one of the family."

Not being shy, our young lady felt unwilling to forego information of any kind, for want of asking. Fixing her dark eyes on him till he fluttered all over, like a cock-

chafer with a pin through its back, she hazarded the innocent remark that she had passed through a beautiful country on her way from the station, and paused to see how it would be taken up. Young Paravant, in some trepidation, felt himself called on to reply. "Glad you like it, I'm sure," said he, blushing a little, and tugging at his shirt-cuffs with the *mauvaise honte* that often accompanies a good deal of self-assertion. "Pretty road from the station. I don't know whether you passed Combe-Wester. Depends on which way you came."

"Combe-Wester. Is it a low white house, under the hill, with an avenue of chestnuts, and an iron gate into the high-road?"

"Right again! That's Combe-Wester, fair enough. What did you think of it?"

"I thought it looked very quiet, very

retired." She was going to add, "very dull," but didn't, and was glad of it the next minute.

"Yes, it's quiet and retired enough. It's a good quarter of a mile, you know, from the road. I hope you'll drive over and take a look round some day, Miss Lee. I belong there. Combe-Wester's *mine*."

She stole a glance at him from under her dark eyelashes, that denoted a dawn of interest, but did not betray one-tenth of the surprise she felt. He seemed so unlike the sort of person that Combe-Wester or any other country-place could belong to. Jack Lopez would have called him "a yokel;" the grown-up young ladies at Miss Quilter's, "a cub." He had dressed for dinner, certainly, thereby falsifying the predictions of his hostess, but he wore coloured trousers and a black neckcloth. He was a good-looking young fellow, too, with healthy

cheeks, sleek brown hair, and little deep-set eyes, that were gray in one light, green in another, but bright and keen in all. At a market-dinner amongst the farmers, you might have taken him for a subaltern of militia; whereas, at a military mess you would have felt assured he was a civilian, and a youth brought up in the country. Miss Lee's knowledge of mankind, acquired from interchange of opinions with her school-fellows, was necessarily limited, but she made up her mind, without the slightest hesitation, that if it really belonged to him, the chief merit of young Paravant was to be found in Combe-Wester.

"I daresay you are very fond of it," said she, turning languidly away to receive the attentions of her host, who, doing as he would be done by, pressed on her many rural delicacies with overpowering hospitality, especially recommending a certain West-

country dish called "junket," that met with her entire approval.

As the Rev. Silas warmed under the influence of good cheer, brown sherry, and cider of his own bottling, better than most people's champagne, he grew more and more chatty and affectionate, engrossing the whole attention of his visitor, while utterly ignoring the scornful glances and snorts of indignation launched at him by his wife. Miss Lee was a good listener, and he detailed to her at considerable length, the responsibilities of his parish, the particulars of his preferment, the peculiarities of the bishop, and shortcomings of sundry parsons, his neighbours, who satisfied their consciences with three services a fortnight, and went hunting twice a week. Then he branched off to his glebe, his Devons, his breed of black Berkshire pigs. He was a practical farmer, you see, and something of a gardener as well, mowed his own lawn,

budded his own roses ; he would show Miss Lee how to do the last, and flattered himself he would inoculate her with a taste for country life. Before the dessert was set on, he had already called her "his dear young lady" three several times, and Mrs. Tregarthen could stand it no longer.

"When Silas has *quite* done with you," said she, making with finger-glass and napkin a signal, called by ladies "the move," and so sailed off to the drawing-room without further delay.

Here the conversation turned, naturally enough, on the guest who arrived to dinner so unceremoniously after they sat down. The rector's wife could fight, none better, but she could also manœuvre. Subsequently, upstairs with her husband, she was very likely to give battle, but in the meantime a change of front seemed more advisable than an attack in line ; so, smoothing her brows, she addressed

her companion with one of those forced smiles that the photograph reproduces to perfection, but no painter has ever succeeded in imitating on canvas.

“And what do you think of him, my dear? Good-looking, isn't he? and pleasant-spoken when he gets over his shyness? Having no children of our own, he's almost like a son to the rector and me. Bless you, he comes and goes here day after day, in and out, just as he pleases; but he's a fine young man, you'll admit.”

“Oh, very,” answered Miss Lee, whose standard of male beauty, like that of her companions, had been formed on certain gentlemen - privates of Her Majesty's Life Guards, frequenting the suburb of Bayswater, with short red jackets and long blue legs. “He ought to be taller, though, to suit my taste.”

“Taller? I don't quite agree with you,

my dear. He's as tall as the rector, and I'm sure that's quite tall enough. I never could see what there is to admire in a man like a maypole. And he has a good property, too. A very good property, if he would take care of it. What he wants is a wife to look after him and keep him straight."

"But surely he's very young," objected the other. "You wouldn't have him marry before his whiskers are grown."

"I don't know anything about whiskers," replied the rector's wife. "Why, if you come to that, look at Mr. Strange. He's thirty, if he's a day, and no more whiskers than the back of my hand. Youth's a drawback, perhaps, in some things, but after all, people get older every day they live. No, there are many men would make worse husbands than young Paravant."

"Paravant—what an extraordinary name!"

“It sounds foreign, don’t it? But it’s a good old West-country family for all that. They have been settled here and at Upper-Appleton, from father to son, pretty near three hundred years. James Paravant is proud of his pedigree, I can tell you, and his name too. It’s French, you know, taken from their motto, ‘Par avant!’ you understand, ‘Always in front.’”

“I see, and it’s rather appropriate. I suppose you call the present representative ‘Forward James.’”

CHAPTER VI.

“FORWARD JAMES.”

THE nickname stuck to him. It was repeated from mouth to mouth till he could not escape hearing it, and, notwithstanding some irritation, found himself compelled to accept the title, and answer, without a murmur, to the appellation of “Forward James.”

Perhaps the sarcasm seemed less pointed to him than to another. He pleased himself, no doubt, by assuming that it inferred many noble qualities, such as active daring superiority in field sports and athletic exercises; above all, a headlong gallantry in affairs of the heart, which young men esteem and appreciate in proportion to the awkwardness of their advances and their ignorance of the


other sex—who, while justly giving preference to the diligent and painstaking over "the laggard in love," are yet sufficiently good judges to recognise the wide difference that exists between haste and speed.

Before Miss Lee had been six weeks at the rectory, "Forward James" was only too happy that she should call him by any name she pleased.

It was pitiable to see the complete subjection into which this young man had been brought, chiefly, I am bound to say, by a course of treatment that he ought to have rebelled against from the first. Miss Lee rarely spoke to him at all. If she did condescend to notice his presence, it was only to contradict his assertions, sneer at his opinions, turn him generally into ridicule, and impress on him practically the meaning of the word "snub."

Paravant, who, such as it was, had

hitherto been the unquestioned "cock of his own walk," felt utterly intimidated and disheartened by an adversary so unlike those over whom he was accustomed to obtain his easy triumphs. Equally unable to fight or fly, he seemed positively to court humiliation and defeat. Hitherto he had considered himself the "show man" of the parish, owning the largest acreage, occupying the best pew in church, possessing a four-wheeled carriage, a good house and garden, stabling for six horses, cows, bees, out-buildings, and a conservatory. Independent in means, and his own master—for his father slept with the other Paravants in Appleton churchyard, and his mother rented a furnished house in Bath—it was the dream of every farmer's daughter within a radius of three miles, to become the wife of this paragon, thereby taking precedence, as a squire's lady, of sisters, rivals, and former friends.



There are differences in rank of which the Lord Chamberlain has no cognisance. A few hundred acres of your own entitle you to more consideration than the rental of half a county from another; and “Forward James,” had he seemed a little less forward in manner, might have been received cordially enough amongst the landed gentry as one of themselves; but he preferred to be king of his company, and affected rather the society of those tenant-farmers and tradesmen with whom his word was law. The Rev. Silas had done what he could for his pupil, and strongly advised him to enter the militia or the yeomanry, but James was too well satisfied with his own advantages to risk competition, and, being a “bumpkin” of the highest calibre, a bumpkin he chose to remain.

Since Miss Lee’s arrival he made some excuse to dine almost every day at the rectory, arriving there in such a heat and

flurry as even the rector's cider seemed unable to cool or compose. On these occasions, however, he found the young lady's conversation either monopolised by the Rev. Silas, who made no secret of his pleasure in her society, or her interest engrossed by Mervyn Strange, whose silence seemed somehow much more to her taste than his own platitudes. Presently he took to watching for her in the garden, where she spent much of her time reading or working in the open air, and pounced upon her with far-fetched excuses for his appearance, and a transparent affectation of surprise to find her in her usual haunt. All this roused her sense of the ridiculous, and provoked her a good deal at the same time.

“Mrs. Tregarthen at home, Miss Lee?” he would inquire, with an air of the deepest solicitude. “She is quite well, I hope.

Passing the house at any rate, you know, I thought I would call to inquire.”

“Quite well, thank you, Mr. Paravant. Wouldn’t you like to see her? You’ll find her in the drawing-room.”

“Oh yes! the drawing-room of course. Perhaps she’s busy, Miss Lee; perhaps I’d better wait a little outside.”

Then Jane would resume her work, taking no more notice of him than of the great blundering bumble-bee groping about among the moss at her feet. After awhile he would ask if he might smoke a cigar in her presence, and, receiving permission, would light up with exceeding satisfaction, because this meant an uninterrupted interview with his idol of some thirty minutes at least.

One day, under the influence of tobacco, he became more demonstrative than usual. She had dropped her book, and picking it up he glanced at the title-page.

“French!” said he, with an air of increased admiration. “Miss Lee, can you speak French?”

“Yes, of course I can; can’t you?”

“Not exactly. You see I haven’t been taught. I’ve never learned lots of things that fellows like Strange know. Tregarthen didn’t take much pains with me. I suppose he saw I wasn’t exactly a book-worm; but I’m not such a fool as I look, Miss Lee.”

“That I can easily believe.”

“Ah! now you’re laughing at me. I don’t mind some people laughing at me; but I wouldn’t stand it from everybody. I dare say you think I couldn’t cut up rough—no more I could with *you*; but I can take my own part as well as most if I’m put upon, and always could from a boy!”

“Why, you’re a boy now.”

“I’m not, I’m past one-and-twenty. If a man isn’t a man at one-and-twenty what’s the

good of coming of age, and giving the labourers beer and all the rest of it? Twenty-one and my own master. Don't you think, Miss Lee, it would be a very good thing if I was to marry?”

“For yourself, do you mean, or the lady?”

“For both. I should be very fond of her, I can tell you; indeed, I'm very fond of her now.”

“Then I certainly shouldn't advise you to think of it. She would lead you the life of a dog!”

“But why? If I did everything she told me, and—and—liked her better than the whole world.”

“I can't conceive anything more tiresome and ridiculous. But why do you ask *me* of all people?”

“Because you are nineteen yourself—because you are so clever and so—so different

from the people down here. Because, Miss Lee—because——”

“Because you can’t get another listener,” she laughed. “Now, take my advice, it’s meant for your good. Do something. Go out into life. Don’t stay blinking here at the daylight, like an owl in a hollow tree, but launch on the stream, and ten years hence, when you feel you are *really* a man, tell some lady you like her, perhaps she will listen to you then. To-day she would only laugh in your face. Don’t be angry. I’m not very old, but I think in such matters I have forgotten more than you ever knew.”

He blushed scarlet; tears of rage and mortification rose to his eyes; but he turned his head away and made shift to swallow them down. Jane Lee went on with her work, thoroughly enjoying his discomfiture.

“Shall you stay to luncheon?” she asked, after a pause. “We rather expect Mr.

Strange. He hasn't been near us for a long time.”

“Does it seem long to you?”

“Yes; the days pass rather slow in the country, and a little excitement goes a great way.”

“Then it *is* excitement to meet Strange at luncheon? Miss Lee, what *can* you see in that fellow? A pompous prig, I call him, and I sometimes think I shall tell him so.”

“Do. He will give you just the sort of set-down you require. I don't know what schoolboys call a prig, but Mr. Strange isn't the least pompous, and, for my part, I think he's very pleasant company.”

If you have ever watched a kitten amusing herself with a ball of string, you must have observed that the instincts of the cat are fully developed in its offspring, and that the one has as little mercy on her plaything as the other on her prey. Jane Lee could

have shown no more skill, taken no more pleasure in making her admirer unhappy, had she been a coquette of ten years' experience—nay, for such obvious distress as his, nine-and-twenty might possibly have felt more compassion than nineteen.

He threw his cigar away with a jerk, and rose stiffly to his feet.

“I—I don't think I can stay to luncheon,” said he, speaking rather low and thick. “I have just remembered that I had forgotten an engagement for the whole afternoon. Please make my excuses to Mrs. Tregarthen. Good-morning, Miss Lee.”

“Good-morning, Mr. Paravant.”

“Good-bye.” He put his hand out and looked reproachfully in her face.

“I don't like saying good-bye,” she answered, taking the offered hand graciously enough. “It sounds as if I was never to see you again. Ain't you coming to dinner?”

“That depends on *you*. I will if you ask me, of course.”

“How can I ask you? It’s not my house. If it were, perhaps you’d have a general invitation, only I should expect you to behave a good deal better than to-day. I’m quite afraid of you, Mr. Paravant, when you’re so cross.”

“Afraid! *You* afraid of *me*! Oh Miss Lee, dear Miss Lee, if you only knew——”

She jumped up, gathering books and needlework in her arms.

“There’s the luncheon-bell!” she exclaimed, hurrying into the house; “and here’s Mr. Strange. It’s too late to keep your appointment now, Mr. Paravant. Better make the best of it, and stay with your friends while you can. Some people never know when they’re well off.”

CHAPTER VII.

TWO STRINGS.

POOR James Paravant, in the hands of such a young lady as my heroine, was like a fly in a spider's web. The more he tried to extricate himself the more helplessly he became entangled. Twenty times in the week did he resolve to put an end to this feverish life of longing and uncertainty in a serious proposal, and was only deterred from so desperate a remedy by grievous ignorance as to the form of words usual on such occasions, and an instinctive conviction that he would be refused point-blank !

In the latter contingency it would be incumbent on him, he thought, to carry out the

part of a despairing lover by flying his country, or at least removing as far as Bath, there to seek "surcease of sorrow" in the society of an admiring mother, and the mild excitements of provincial dissipation. "She would be sorry," he thought, "when it was too late, and the heart that had worshipped her so fondly was lost to her for ever." But in the meantime he hungered to see her every day—was exceedingly loth to leave Combe-Wester just as his grass was ready to cut—and reflected, not without reason, that one could hardly expect to advance in the good graces of a mistress by calmly resigning her to a rival, and giving up the pursuit in disgust.

Had he a rival? He asked himself the question, very often, to answer it angrily in the affirmative. With the instincts of a lower nature, he mistrusted, no less than he disliked, Mervyn Strange. While professing contempt for a man who could neither ride nor shoot,

nor tie flies, nor play cricket, nor, indeed, drink beer and smoke tobacco, he was yet conscious of the other's superiority in moral energy, force of character, and the mental qualities that win success in life. To enter the lists against such an adversary was to court defeat, and yet how could he bear to abandon the contest? The more he thought the matter over the more he hated Mervyn Strange, the more he felt satisfied his life's happiness depended on the favour of Jane Lee.

In those complications which romantic people call affairs of the heart, there is nothing so pitiable as a reversal of that superiority erroneously supposed to be the prerogative of man in his relations with the other sex. When the lover grovels of his own accord in the dirt, he cannot complain if he is trodden on. "Forward James," as we have seen, knew no French. He had never heard, nor could he have translated, the sensible maxim,

that in all relations of life, "*Il faut se faire valoir*;" but there was not the same excuse for Mervyn Strange.

Before these two men had been six weeks under the influence of Jane Lee's attractions, each succumbed, in his own way, to the charm that each, in his own way, did his utmost to resist.

Paravant, as was natural, went down without much struggle, but for his senior the process of subjugation was longer, more complicated, not devoid of cruelty and coercion. Some girls, independently of education and opportunity, are born coquettes, and of these, an earnest, simple-minded man, especially when imaginative and self-conscious, seems the natural prey. The strongest attachments are those which defy the laws of probability, and the fitness of things. When a boy's first love is a woman of forty, she finds herself the object of an infatuation that,

despise it though she may, is touching in the absurdity of its self-abnegation and self-sacrifice. When a young lady compels some contemporary of her papa to dance attendance, in chains and tight boots, on her every movement, she enjoys an absolute sovereignty, of which she cannot but recognise the absurdity, while conscious that she is neither worthy nor willing to be so adored by such an admirer.

When two people are thrown together, whose paths through life have been shaped for them in opposite directions, for whom straitened means, family quarrels, other entanglements, have made affection a torment, and marriage an impossibility, they will go on caring for each other till they are gray, with a constancy that can only be accounted for on a principle of contradiction inherent in the human race, derived perhaps from our common mother in her garden of Eden, hankering after forbidden fruit.

Whereas, if Adonis, with ten thousand a year in a ring-fence, marries Hebe with an adjoining ten thousand a year, also in a ring-fence, cheered by the enthusiastic approval of friends, relations, tenants in the marquee, labourers on the lawn, and five columns of the county paper, the chances are they will be yawning in three months, wrangling in six, and starting before the year is out on a journey that, notwithstanding many stoppages, much hesitation, frequent turnings back, and puttings on of the drag-chain, too often terminates in sin, shame, discovery, the Divorce Court, and misery for life.

Mervyn Strange, however—taking himself to task severely in a solitary walk to visit a parishioner—had not yet arrived at such reflections as these. Steep and rugged are the heights of Mount Ida after our footsteps have fairly entangled us in the thickets and precipices that defend her shrine; but the

start is pleasant enough, rising gradually on an easy incline, covered with grass and flowers. The clergyman began to labour, and stumble, and catch his breath, ere he was aware he had really left the plain. The first time he saw Jane Lee, he said to himself, "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever!" with the sense of admiration, apart from any idea of possession, that we experience in contemplating the macaws in the Zoo, for instance, the Koh-i-noor diamond, or, say, the golden image of Prince Albert, the great and good, in Hyde Park. The second time, on leaving her, he felt it required an effort to shake off the influence of a presence that seemed to hang about him like the memory of a scent or a song. The third, he wondered what she thought of *him*, and decided that *if* he were not a clergyman, and *if* he had any intentions of marrying, with many similar contingencies, this was in every respect the

sort of girl he should like to make his wife.

When a man has got thus far, he seldom comes back again a single step. The thorns may be sharp and frequent, the path rugged, overgrown, and full of holes; but, after all, it is a garden of roses, even though they hang out of reach.

Self-examination has been much recommended by divines rather than philosophers, as a wholesome discipline for the mind. I am inclined to doubt if its effects are so remedial as those of constant responsibility and occupation. When the pressure is raised to hard work it takes the nonsense out of us with extraordinary effect; and I am persuaded that no amount of solitary reflection, no thinking a matter over, backwards and forwards, to end where we began, enables us to encounter its difficulties so successfully as the energy we derive from intercourse,

collision, even contest, with our fellow-men.

Mervyn Strange had a long walk before him through a pretty country, and not much, necessarily, to take up his attention. The invalid he proposed to visit was deaf as well as bed-ridden. His sermon against next Sunday was prepared—not written, you understand, because he persisted in preaching extempore, and in doing it remarkably ill. The school-feast, having taken place last week, was off his mind. Appleton revel, with its yearly overflow of drunkenness and disorder, had not yet arrived. The hay-harvest, now at its height of richness and fragrance, affected him neither one way nor the other. He could afford leisure for a pitched battle with his own heart, and the *causa teterrima* was Jane Lee.

His tactics seemed wrong from the beginning. In all contests of love or war, half

measures must necessarily be fatal. You may fight, or you may fly; but if you strike it should be as hard as ever you can; if you run away you must break the bridges behind you, and on no account turn back to look after your baggage. In spite of their true hearts and honest natures, I appeal to the Royal Navy whether blue water is not an effectual cure for love.

Green fields, however, particularly in the rich West country at midsummer, have a very different effect. New-mown hay, the song-birds, the fainter note of the cuckoo, sweet-brier overhead and buttercups underfoot, are apt to soften and stultify. The male heart, marble in St. James's, becomes wax in Somersetshire; and the ancients were right in assuming nature to be a feminine deity, though, unlike women in general, she seems favourably inclined to her own sex.

Mervyn Strange could understand—nobody

better—why to-day there was a deeper blue in the sky, and why the wild aromatic odours that breathed from a golden blaze of gorse woke in his heart a thousand tender fancies and desires—vague, indefinite, coming and going, like the breeze over the hay-fields, charged, like that pleasant air, with such a sweetness as seemed to enthrall his senses and intoxicate his brain.

Who shall explain how the droning of a bee, the lowing of a cow, the grating seesaw of a haymaker sharpening his scythe, could recall such a picture as this to the imagination of a hard-worked parish priest? A pale proud face, with clear-cut features, and lips somewhat too thin, that curved less often in mirth than scorn; a dainty head, carried high, as though accustomed to wear a crown; dark waves of hair, shining, luxuriant, of which to possess one single thread he would have sacrificed a limb; taper hands,

with the filbert-finished fingers suggestive of her supple shapely race ; arched and slender feet ; a lithe yet swelling form ; and eyes, of which the glances that he always sought, yet always shrank from meeting, seemed to thrill him even here in the meadows—a full league off as the crow flies.

“ I must *not* think of her ! ” he told himself again and again, while he thought of nothing else, as he swung along from stile to stile, and field to field, at the rate of five miles an hour: “ If I were weak enough to allow it, this beautiful girl would take entire possession of my faculties, and I should be good for nothing in my calling as a priest. For a layman, I can conceive no greater pride, no greater happiness, than to throw his heart down at her feet, and bid her take it up into her bosom, or crush its life out in the dust, that it might never beat for another again. Oh what a lot ! what a heaven upon earth !

to be hers, to serve her, to defend her, to watch her every look and action, to be with her day and night!

“But this is the very thought that I must drive out of my mind at any cost, at any sacrifice. St. George had never been canonised but for the Dragon, and she is *my* Dragon, standing across the path to heaven! Oh that we could meet in close and mortal combat! I would be content to perish at her feet, her breath on my brow, her calm, cruel, maddening eyes looking down into mine. To perish? Ay, but it would be to perish everlastingly! And these poor souls committed to my charge, this score or two of silly sheep entrusted to my keeping, here literally in the wilderness—shall I not be faithful over a few things? Shall I, the shepherd, leave them to the wolf, because of a girl’s dark eyes, that look upon me kindly twice or thrice in a week? Oh my

darling! my darling! how much would I give up for your sake! But no! I dare not. I *will* not! Henceforth I must school and harden myself, till I become a man of steel. You shall be to me as the statue of a goddess in a gallery, or the picture of a nymph on a wall. I will come into your presence without a tremor, leave it without a sigh, and—and because I could love you so dearly, I will worship you and care for you no more!”

Having arrived at this sensible determination, it is not surprising that the curate, after fulfilling his parish duties, should have so timed his walk and directed his steps, as to pass his rector's garden at the hour Jane Lee was pretty sure to be sitting there with book or work-basket, under her accustomed tree.

When people have made up their minds to overcome temptation, they are usually

indiscreetly eager to put their good resolutions to the test. I doubt if the plan often answers, and am inclined to think that for men, and women too, it is safer, in such cases, to run than to fight. Mervyn Strange, however, was a strong-minded person, priding himself on his force of character, and this was the result.

A great start of surprise, assumed, no doubt, because he *must* have expected to see her, or why did he pass that way? A rush of blood to his brow, followed by unnatural pallor and white twitching lips. A constrained greeting, that might have convinced the merest schoolgirl of her power, and a little nervous laugh, of which he was painfully conscious and pitifully ashamed. Miss Lee, on the other hand, seemed perfectly cool and collected. It is not to be supposed she was ignorant of the effect she produced, nor do I believe but that a young lady can

appreciate the homage she doubtless considers her due, with as much discernment at nineteen as at any subsequent period of her life.

Miss Quilter was an excellent governess, her establishment was conducted on principles of rigorous seclusion, befitting such a nunnery of modern times; yet a little bird told *me* that her pupils, of all ages, were in the habit of discussing with considerable freedom the relative influence of the sexes, and that in one of their parliaments, held under a certain sycamore on summer afternoons after school-hours, little Miss Moffat, whose frock barely reached her ankles, was heard to declare, that in *her* opinion no girl of spirit should be contented with less than two admirers on hand at once, or accept an offer of marriage till she had already refused three!

Jane Lee, then, the tallest, the hand-

somest, the most daring and precocious of these budding beauties, cannot but have studied such subjects—theoretically, at least—with sufficient attention to form her own ideas, and act up to her own opinions. She was no blundering novice, stumbling here, slipping there, and breaking her head or her heart against an obstacle, in the flurry and confusion of unaccustomed ignorance. She seemed rather an experienced mariner, who had carefully conned charts and taken bearings for the traversing of latitudes as yet unexplored; so that, in spite of his seniority, his manhood, his acquirements, and his calling, Mervyn Strange was a mere puppet in her hands. She could fool, tease, soothe, or provoke him at will, and was likely to give him about as much rope, show him about as much mercy, as the cat already mentioned affords to a mouse, or the kitten to its ball of string.

CHAPTER VIII.

BRED IN THE BONE.

“WHY do you never come near us, Mr. Strange? No, I won't shake hands. I shake hands with people who are glad to see me, and you're *not*.”

He had schooled himself to be ice and marble, so the something that shot through him like an electric current while she spoke was of no consequence whatever.

“I—I looked in as I happened to be passing,” he stammered. “I had no idea I should find you at home.”

“That's just what I say. If you had, you wouldn't have come! Well, now you *are* here you can make yourself useful. In

the first place, help me to tie up these roses in one bunch. Not that way! How clumsy men are! Their fingers are all thumbs!"

Her taper hands touched his own; their heads were bent over the posy; he could feel her breath on his cheek. What a mercy that he could make up his mind not to care for her! Without such preparation, the position would have been dangerous in the extreme. He had taken a second-class at Oxford, was a man of abilities over the average, a good theologian, well read in classical authors, ancient history, modern literature, and he was racking his brains for something to say to a girl of nineteen, yet could elicit no more original remark than the obvious truism that "Flowers are very beautiful," adding, as a brilliant afterthought: "You—you are fond of flowers, Miss Lee?"

“No, I’m not!” she answered. “I hate the order and neatness of a garden ; I hate everything prim, and tame, and artificial. I should like to be a savage, Mr. Strange, and dress skins in a wigwam !”

But for his late resolutions, he felt how willingly he would have exchanged the high black waistcoat, soft hat, long skirts, and decent externals of a Christian minister, for beads, blanket, war-paint, and wampum, with such a squaw as this to warm the lodge and brighten the wilderness by her smiles ; but he remonstrated gravely, nevertheless :

“You cannot be in earnest, Miss Lee ; you cannot wish to barter the comforts of home, the privileges, the luxuries, the social advantages of civilisation, for a mere animal existence, limited to such wants and pleasures as are shared by the beasts of the field.”

“Say rather the birds of the air. Fancy the delight of being free. No clocks, no

regular meals, no afternoon calls, no reading, no writing, no duty towards your neighbour, and above all, no friends !”

He was hurt, and showed it. “That is not a kind speech,” said he, “Perhaps the friends might feel lonely, though *you* would not !”

“Who is there to miss me ?” she asked, bending her dark eyes on him, with an expression half tender, half scornful, but wholly perplexing, that pleased and pained him at the same time. “Few girls of my age are so much alone in the world. I don’t complain. I shouldn’t like a lot of brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins. The ordinary humdrum relationships of life would only fret and provoke me, and make me worse than I am. No, it is better to be a wild bird, out of the nest for good and all, flying from tree to tree, at its own will, to perch on any branch it fancies. If I were to pack up my traps, and

disappear to-morrow morning, nobody knows where, I don't believe I should be missed one bit, and I'm sure I shouldn't care whether I were or not!"

"You cannot mean it," he replied, in some agitation. "It grieves me to hear you speak like that. It seems so sad, so unnatural for such a—such a—such a—person as yourself, with youth, health, a good education, good looks——"

She interrupted him.

"Stop a moment, good looks are a matter of opinion; and granting that I had them, what's the use of being good-looking, with nobody to look at one?"

"There's many a gem of purest ray serene," he murmured, for in truth, such was the man's discomfiture in this unequal warfare that he was fain to fall back on memory, rather than trust ingenuity, for continuance of a contest that threatened his downfall at every turn.

“I know,” she replied laughing; “but I’m *not* serene, and I don’t want to blush unseen—I don’t want to blush at all. Nothing makes one look such a fool, Mr. Strange.”

“Miss Lee——”

“I don’t like you to call me Miss Lee. It sounds stiff and formal. I suppose it wouldn’t be right for you to call me Jane?”

He turned pale. All his good resolutions were forgotten. “I’m not sure.”

“And yet Mr. Paravant does, and you’re a great deal older than James.”

The good resolutions came back with a rush, but brought with them not a shade of colour to his cheek.

Called her by her christian-name, did he?—that cub!—and she let him! To be sure, “Forward James” might not have asked permission. After *all*, what did it matter to *him*? He was vexed to find himself irritated by such a trifle!

“Shall I tell you the name I always think of you by?” he asked, with a little tremble of the voice that no doubt she marked and understood: “Dark, beautiful, shadowy, vague as a dream, mysterious as night; for me you have never been Miss Lee; anybody could be Miss Lee: you are my ‘Beltenebrosa.’”

She had not an idea what it meant, but her black eyes flashed, and a flush of pleasure rose to her brow.

“Beltenebrosa!” she repeated. “Oh, thank you, Mr. Strange; what a lovely name! I shall always call myself Beltenebrosa, and it will remind me of *you*. How nice to be so wise! to have read everything, to remember everything, to know everything. Yes, a man had better be clever than young, or strong, or even handsome. James Paravant might have puzzled a long time before he found me such a name as that. It’s too charming; say it again.”

Did she know how she tortured him? how this proud, sensitive, conscientious spirit winced and withered under the alternate applications of ice and fire so mercilessly imposed? Let us hope not. Let us hope that the higher aspirations, the deeper sufferings of a character like this, were as unintelligible as they would have been impossible to the nature she inherited with her gipsy beauty and her gipsy blood.

If she had one prevailing desire, one dominating instinct, it was a wild longing for freedom—the real practical freedom of open air, common, woodland, and moor. It seemed to rise and stir in her veins like the sap in a young tree that puts forth its leaves, dons its holiday attire, and, so to speak, stretches out its branches to meet the spring. For her, the wealth of gray, and green, and pink, and white, and lavender that deepens an English landscape in early June, like some

beautiful matron arrayed for a wedding-feast, was no inanimate abstraction to be admired, but an actual living personality to be loved. While she drank in their beauty through all her senses, she would fain have identified herself with the breeze, the cloud, the broken water, the dancing sunshine, and merged her own being in that nature, which appeared to her less the effect than the great first cause of generation, life, and light. Sitting out-of-doors whenever she had the opportunity, she seemed to gain strength and refreshment from air and light, as others do from food and wine. The arch of heaven was her natural roof-tree, and only in the boundless freedom of space did she feel thoroughly at home. Even in her school-days she would look wistfully towards Kensington Gardens, as, passing to and from Miss Quilter's polite establishment, she coasted that urban wilderness, which prevents Londoners from completely forgetting

the poetry of out-door life, the hidden charm that lies in groves and glades, summer skies, breaking buds, and teeming bursts of nature, vindicating her immortality, when

Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And grasping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers.

In the meantime she turned her bewildering glances on Mervyn Strange, as if she had no thought nor feeling in the universe but for *him*. He was losing his head.

“Will you give me one of those roses?” said he, bending towards the cluster in her hand. “I—I shall value it exceedingly. I am so fond of roses.”

It was a lame conclusion. Shy men generally begin by asking for a flower, and probably so innocent a request is a fair challenge enough, and as good as any other. Rosalind, if I remember right, recommends an attempt

at kissing as the least indelicate resource for breaking the awkward silence sometimes observed in such interviews; but so compromising an expedient seems more trying to both parties, as involving immediate action for attack and defence; nor do I think that a diffident suitor extricates himself from such a position quite to his own satisfaction, or that of his companion. The curate must have meant to finish his sentence very differently, as the young lady perhaps expected, but for the sudden appearance of Mr. Tregarthen crossing the lawn, with a less assured step than usual, and a strange expression of concern, even dismay, on his florid prosperous face. Crushing a yellow envelope in his hand, he took no notice of Strange, but walked straight up to Miss Lee.

“Jane,” he said, speaking, though hoarse and thick, in a very kind voice—“Jane, my dear young lady, Mrs. Tregarthen wishes

to see you immediately. In the drawing-room, if you please. Now, this moment, my dear. You will find her quite alone."

And the two disappeared within the French windows, leaving Mervyn Strange outside, to congratulate himself on the escape he had made, or ponder on the chance he had thrown away.

But he could not tear himself from the place. Curiosity, interest, affection, even anxiety, anchored him to a spot so lately hallowed by the presence of his Beltenebrosa. Would she come back before dinner, and if so, should he take up the thread of his discourse where he had left off, or wait for a fairer opportunity, or tear this weakness from his heart, and give up the idea once for all? Such renunciation seemed feasible enough this morning; was it possible now? With a keen pang, it occurred to him that the sacrifice might be uncalled for, after all. What was

this sudden communication, obviously telegraphic, this important message, to be delivered privately in the drawing-room, and by Mrs. Tregarthen herself? Surely it must mean an offer of marriage, conveyed indeed on the electric wire, yet none the less impudent for that. And if so, was he a broken-hearted man? Had it come to this? He rather thought he was.

“Then let the stricken deer go weep,” he murmured, with an aching sense of desolation, a longing desire for solitude, silence, and stupor, perhaps, rather than repose.

At such a moment he could but impatiently support the presence of a person he disliked so much as young Mr. Paravant.

“Forward James,” however, enjoying a happy unconsciousness that he was ever unwelcome, swung into the rectory garden and clicked the gate behind him, with a jaunty air of self-possession and content. He, too,

had been employing his leisure in pondering on the charms of our young lady and her reception of his advances, to arrive at the conclusion that she was fully sensible of his merits, and ("gals were all alike") only assumed a little coyness and reluctance, for the purpose of "bringing him on." He returned to the rectory garden an hour before dinner, in the hope of resuming a *tête-à-tête* too abruptly broken off, and was sorely disappointed when he saw the curate hovering about the spot where he expected to find Jane Lee.

The two men disliked each other cordially. But what would you have? This is a world of shams—even far away in quiet Somerset, they were obliged to be civil, and say "How d'ye do?"

"Nice weather for haymaking," observed the younger, wiping from his brow some drops of perspiration, the result of uneasiness

rather than temperature. "I've got forty acres down in Appleton-Cleves. I should be out more than a 'pony' if it came on to rain. I suppose you won't pray for fine weather on Sunday, shall you?"

Strange looked displeased. "You had better ask the rector," said he stiffly. "The welfare of humanity is not dependent on Appleton hay-harvest, but he will meet your wishes, no doubt."

"Oh! I don't want to put him out of his way, nor you neither," answered the other, with perfect equanimity. "In fact, I dare say I shall not be at church myself. I should like to see Tregarthen, though, before I go home to-night. I was thinking of dining here."

"The rector has received some important news, and I fancy would rather not be disturbed. He came out just now, much agitated and perplexed. It is not five minutes since he went into the house."

“ And Miss Lee ? ”

“ And Miss Lee.”

Both coloured at the mention of her name, both turned paler the next moment, each felt he had read the other's secret and exposed his own. If either entertained any previous doubt or hesitation, his intentions were fixed and decided now. There was the prize, here stood his rival. It must be a stand-up fight, and let the best man win !

CHAPTER IX.

“AND IS OLD DOUBLE DEAD?”

“COMPOSE yourself, my dear,” said Mrs. Tregarthen, as the glass doors closed behind Miss Lee, shutting out the scent of flowers, the song of birds, the smiling summer sky, and her two lovers eyeing each other on the lawn; “compose yourself, I—I—have something very painful to communicate!”

The good lady was shaking all over—hands, cap, ribbons, chain, lockets, and general exterior vibrated like the leaves on a poplar in a breeze.

“Let me break it to her, Selina,” interrupted the rector. “Compose yourself, my dear, we must all encounter these trials soon or late!”

The girl looked from one to the other, with head up and muscles braced; her dark eyes glared and shone like those of a wild animal trapped by hunters, a *fera naturæ* of some fierce and restless order, such as the leopardess, the wild-cat, or the lynx.

“Don’t keep me in suspense,” she said. “Out with it! I can bear *anything!*”

“My dear, your guardian,” sobbed the rector’s wife, and fairly burst into tears.

“Mr. Lopez, my dear,” added the rector, in a calmer voice, yet sadly troubled too. “So sudden, so unlooked-for! I had not received the telegram five minutes before I came to you——”

She drew herself up, tall, handsome, and defiant.

“He’s dead, I know he is!” she answered. “I am left without a soul to care for me in the world!”

Mr. and Mrs. Tregarthen looked at each

other in sore perplexity. Had she wept, or screamed, or gone into hysterics, or done anything that warranted the application of sherry and sal volatile, they would have known how to act; but this was a new experience, a phase of grief they had never before seen or realised. The girl's limbs were rigid, her face pale and set, not softened in any degree by so awful a calamity, but rather wild and stern, as though accepting such an injury less in sorrow than in anger.

"You have anticipated me," said the rector. "Alas, my dear, your forebodings are too true!" and proceeded with much circumlocution, many reflections—logical, obvious, perfectly indisputable, yet none the more consolatory—to relate such particulars as he had gathered from the telegram of her guardian's demise. These were scanty, but clear and conclusive enough. Jack Lopez had been ailing after dinner, in a doctor's hands at

midnight, and dead before morning. It was a commonplace event, and out of his own immediate circle, affected nobody but a few creditors who held his bills, of which they were already beginning to suspect the worthlessness. Said one Jew to another, meeting in a stone-paved passage by Stag's Court :

“Have you heard about Shack Lopez ?”

“Broke, is he ?” was the reply. “I've known it these three months.”

“Worse than that, mine friend. He's dead. Went off the hooks this morning at sunrise.”

“Glad he don't owe me anything. Shack couldn't pay twopence in the pound. Poor Shack ! what a fool he was !”

And this was Jack's epitaph. Shorter and less complimentary than that pronounced by Justice Shallow on the bowman defunct—
“And is old Double dead ?” Few of us can

expect more. For one or two the columns of a daily paper are ruled in black; to half-a-dozen it vouchsafes an incorrect biography of the smallest type; a few score find a place at the end of the year in "our obituary of notable persons deceased;" but to your disappearance and mine, the general public will, in all probability, be profoundly indifferent. Only a former friend or two, an acquaintance here and there, who deals in the latest news, will stop for a moment to ask carelessly—"And is old Double dead?"

Was it worth while to "shoot a good shoot" for such obsequies as these? Yes, it is always worth while to shoot a good shoot! Stand up like a man, bend your bow, straighten your back, draw your arrow to the head, aim true and steady; whether you get an outer or an inner ring, a white, a gold, a bull's-eye, or miss the target altogether, do your level best, and never doubt but that,

according to your intentions, not your merits, you will take a prize.

History fails to inform us how "old Double" cut up, but when his executors administered the affairs of Jack Lopez, except for a sum of five hundred pounds secured to Jane Lee, he did not leave behind him a shilling. Like many another speculator, he seemed to have spent his money as fast as he made it; gambling in all kinds of stocks and shares, so as to lose with one hand what he gained with the other. Generous on occasion, but never just, extravagant at all times, and often dishonest, quick, acute, versatile, with a strong belief in his own luck, he was fond of boasting that it was his nature to be "a man or a mouse," and that he would die a millionaire or a beggar. It appeared subsequently that he meant to make his ward sole heiress of the noble fortune he hoped to acquire, but these magnificent intentions have

nothing to do with my story, as they were never carried out.

It was a melancholy evening at the rectory. Jane Lee could not be induced to leave her room. Paravant and Strange, informed, rather incoherently, by their hostess, of the calamity that had befallen, felt it only decent to take leave, and Mr. Tregarthen sat down to dinner with his wife, much perplexed as to what should be done and how to do it. Ought he to offer the bereaved young lady a home? Perhaps she had no other friends. At her age, and—and—with her appearance, she must not be turned loose on the world. What did Selina think? Selina, as usual, saw both sides of the question, prepared to approve whichever he did *not*. She pointed out, with some truth, that the rector might find himself in a false position, from which extrication would be difficult, whether he adopted one course or the other. If the girl were penniless, and he

offered her a home, it would be exceedingly awkward for all parties ; but again, if she turned out to be an heiress, and he made no sign, would they not lose the benefit of her friendship, and their share, however small, in the eventual advantages of her wealth ? It was not for want of discussion, that when tea went into the drawing-room, nothing had been settled but that the Rev. Silas should proceed to London next day by an early train, and learn what he could. In the meantime, Mrs. Tregarthen would do all in her power, without committing him, to console poor Jane, and, as she phrased it, “keep the girl easy in her mind.”

In difficulties of a domestic nature, the decisions at which people arrive are almost always upset as soon as made. Mr. and Mrs. Tregarthen, congratulating themselves that for the present they had solved a knotty point, and put off their trouble to a future day,

were somewhat startled and discomfited by the opening of the drawing-room door, and the apparition of Jane Lee on the threshold, tall, pale, and noiseless as a ghost. She entered the apartment perfectly calm and self-possessed, to take up a position, with much dignity, bolt upright in front of the master of the house, who half rose and sat timidly down again, fairly overawed.

“Mr. Tregarthen,” she said, calmly enough, “I leave here to-morrow morning. I am come to wish you and Mrs. Tregarthen good-bye. Don’t look at me like that. I am going home—straight home. I *must* see him before he’s screwed down !”

“Oh Jane !” exclaimed the rector’s wife.

“I *must* see him,” she repeated, in the same monotonous voice, while her eyes wandered vaguely over the other’s face and figure. “I have got to say good-bye ; I have got to ask him to come back to me, if people

ever *do* come back. But that's all nonsense. When they go from here they go for good, if they go anywhere ; but I don't believe a word of all that !”

Mrs. Tregarthen looked inexpressibly shocked. She could find no words to reply, while, turning to the rector, Jane Lee proceeded, without altering a muscle of her countenance :

“I shall start early. The train passes before nine. If he knows anything now, he will know I got to him as soon as I could.”

“My dear, you can't go alone,” gasped the rector's wife.

“Why not ? I came here alone. Good night, Mrs. Tregarthen ; good night everybody. It's all over now. *Bon soir la compagnie !*” and she walked out of the drawing room, sad and dreamy as Ophelia, but stern and resolute as Lady Macbeth.

“I had better take her with me,” said the

rector, after a long thoughtful pause. "We shall have to be off in good time—I think I'll go to bed at once. Will you tell them about breakfast, Selina? We shall want it earlier than usual."

He rose from his arm-chair, but sank back before he could get fairly on his feet.

"By all that's—that's—well—that's detestable!" exclaimed the rector, "I've got it again. If it had only come on last week, or waited till next! I was half afraid of it! I didn't feel right yesterday—you shouldn't have let me drink port wine and cider the same day. It's too provoking! It *does* seem so hard! Now it's really caught hold of me, I shall not be able to move for a fortnight, and as for going to London to-morrow, I might just as well think of going to Peru!"

The rector's apprehensions were not unreasonable. It was simply an attack of lumbago—his old enemy, that when it got

him down would keep him down, he well knew, as effectually as if he had been screwed into his arm-chair. In vain his Selina mixed him hot drinks of a comforting nature, and turning him over on the connubial four-poster, rubbed hartshorn and oil into his back till her own hands were sore. By two o'clock in the morning it seemed clear enough that the Rev. Silas was incapacitated from moving a limb, while his wife, through the two hideous night-caps she persisted in wearing, could hear Jane Lee making preparations for immediate departure in her bedroom overhead.

Mrs. Tregarthen was a person of resource. Even could she have been induced to leave her husband in his present state of helplessness—a desertion, to do her justice, she contemplated not for an instant—a railway journey terminating in London, with the charge of anybody or anything, was an un-

dertaking of which she felt perfectly incapable, and therefore it never entered her head to accompany Miss Lee; but she reflected that what people cannot do for themselves other people can do for them, and, as she argued, "What's the use of a curate except to take his rector's duty, and stand in his rector's place?" Yes, if he were ten years older perhaps it would be better; but in great emergencies one must not be too particular. Mervyn Strange, to use her own words, was "as steady as old Time," and Mervyn Strange should take the girl to London, since to London she persisted in going, under a promise from both that, after making all necessary arrangements for the funeral, they would return by mail train that same night.

The curate, before his shaving-glass, at six o'clock on a summer's morning, was no less startled than pleased to receive from

Mrs. Tregarthen the following brief and dictatorial missive :

“DEAR MR. STRANGE,

“Knowing you are an early riser, I am not afraid this will find you in bed. The rector is laid up with rheumatism, and I wish you therefore to take his place in escorting Miss Lee to London by the nine o'clock train. I expect you both to return to-night by the mail. Please come at once to the rectory for further directions.

“Yours sincerely,

“SELINA TREGARTHEN.

“P.S.—Of course I need not remind you that in committing such a charge to your care, I rely implicitly on your character for common sense and discretion.”

That the curate should have selected a newer suit of clothes, a neater pair of boots

than those laid out for his usual wear, only infers that he was mortal, and foolishly in love with Jane Lee. That he should have accepted such a trust, however joyfully, with many misgivings and mental reservations, infers that, like the rest of us, he had no objection to rush on his fate blindfold, so long as his own hands might tie the bandage over his eyes; but that he should have packed a small portmanteau with garments enough to last a week, argued a character replete with foresight and precaution equal to all emergencies, and, while hoping for the best, prepared to confront the worst.

He was shocked, though, and deeply moved, to mark the alteration one night of sorrow had made in the beautiful features of Jane Lee. As she stepped over the threshold into the summer morning, he started, as from a blow, to observe the contrast of that pale drawn face with the glad sunshine

and the fresh blooming flowers. He had not the heart to pull one from its stalk and offer it to the mourner, but he thought sadly enough of poor Ophelia, with her rosemary and rue. After a few hasty injunctions from Mrs. Tregarthen, he handed her respectfully into the fly, and took his own seat by the driver, on the box, without a word. She appreciated this forbearance, we may be sure, nor was her passionate grief for the loss of her guardian so engrossing as to stifle certain tender feelings of gratitude and even preference, created by the sympathy and consideration of Mervyn Strange.

CHAPTER X.

“SIXTY-MILE-AN-HOUR.”

A MAN in love, at least under middle age, is usually an early riser. James Paravant, with forty acres of grass down in Appleton-Cleves, thought well to visit his haymakers before breakfast. Returning from that fertile meadowland by the high-road, he thus met the very fly that conveyed Miss Lee to the station, and, catching a glimpse of her face in the conveyance, felt much surprise and vexation to recognise Mervyn Strange on the box. So complete was his discomfiture, he had not even presence of mind to stop the carriage, in order to wish its occupant good-bye, but stood gaping in the road, utterly paralysed

and overcome. He pulled himself together, as people unused to emergencies generally do, just when it was too late, but showed a deal of misapplied energy in trying to make up for lost time.

In three minutes he was at his own stable door, nearly half a mile off, vociferating like a madman for groom and helpers. "Forward James," as he often boasted, liked to ride "something that could gallop a bit;" and, to do him justice, seemed quite capable of making the animal exert its powers. In his present state of excitement he was not disposed to let the grass grow under his feet.

"Isaac! Reuben!" he shouted, as two close-cropped heads and four bare arms to match appeared from the hay-loft. "Reuben! Isaac! Here, one of you! Clap a saddle on Potboy. Be smart, man alive! Not that bridle—the Pelham. Don't hang at it for an hour! Have the horse turned round and

ready by the time I come down !” Then he rushed upstairs to cram some money into his pockets and put on a better hat.

I suppose none of us ever ordered a horse out in a hurry, not even on emergencies involving matters of life and death, without experiencing certain hindrances and delays caused by too religious an observance of those stable rites that the most careless of grooms would rather perish than forego. By accustomed hands, the animal can be stripped, saddled, turned round and bridled in about two minutes ; but it seems impossible for it to leave the stable under five. Each foot must be lifted and examined, perhaps blacked, the mane set straight, combed, and finally water-brushed. Nothing—not even a running accompaniment of curses, as Paravant found to his extreme disgust—can be made to hasten these operations.

Miss Lee and her escort had already taken

their seats in a first-class carriage when "Forward James," lengthening a stirrup as he went, passed through his own gate into the high-road at a gallop. But Potboy could slip along when he was extended, and under the impression no doubt that he was running for money, therefore, judging by his own experience, likely to be pulled up before he could win, laid himself out in such good form as to bring his master into the station within seven minutes of the start from his own stable door.

Both were exceedingly hot and uncomfortable. The horse relieved his feelings by a shake, the rider by an oath; for the latter only gained the platform as a train glided from it with asthmatic puffs and one of those defiant whistles that seem to say, "Catch me if you can!"

It is out of my power to explain why Paravant should have felt so disappointed, or

what he intended to do had he arrived in time. I do not believe he could give any definite reason for being so hard on Potboy, or that he had formed any plan in his own mind for hindrance of the fugitives. His heart was on fire, his head in a whirl. He had never been accustomed to reflection, self-control, or discipline of any kind, and rode his horse as fast as it could lay legs to the ground, simply because the violent exercise and excitement served for the moment to take him out of himself.

Flurried, disordered, red-hot, and in a profuse perspiration, he felt painfully conscious that he looked like a fool as he gazed after the departing train; nor did it tend to restore his equanimity that he might be seen by two of the travellers in this ridiculous plight, and laughed at for his pains. He recovered, however, after a time, and availed himself of his intimacy with the

station-master to make some inquiries, while he lit a cigar.

“Any passengers this morning?” he asked, with such affectation of carelessness as could only deceive a pre-occupied official, ruler in hand, and pencil in mouth.

“Two—first-class, Mr. Paravant,” answered the station-master, “and one second. Did you miss the train, sir? I thought perhaps as you might have been going up along of Mr. Strange.”

“Mr. Strange? Not I. Was he travelling alone?”

“Well, sir, I think not. He took two tickets for Paddington—returns they was—available by the down express.”

Returns! Paravant felt that a load had been lifted from his heart. She was coming back, then, and he should see her again! The relief from pain amounted to actual pleasure, and he could hardly bear even

Strange a grudge for taking away his idol, since he seemed pledged to bring it back again. How miserable he would have felt had he heard of her departure by accident, and remained uncertain of her return! How well Potboy had brought him! What a good little horse it was! and how lucky he came straight to the station!

He would have thought differently, perhaps, had he overheard a conversation between the two people in whom he was so deeply interested, that originated in his sudden appearance, and might never have taken place but for his late arrival.

“There’s James Paravant, I declare!” said Miss Lee, pulling up the window, as the train increased its speed. “What on earth can have brought *him* to the station?”

“I think I can guess,” answered Mervyn Strange, arranging her wraps and belongings

with tender care. "He came to see the last of *you*, and to wish you good-bye."

He was pleased to think she had woken up out of her sorrow enough to notice anything, and encouraged her to talk, even about his rival, rather than not talk at all.

"And he *has* seen the last of me," she replied, with perfect composure. "I don't think I shall ever come back to Somersetshire again."

"But I've got our return tickets in my pocket!" exclaimed the clergyman, feeling his brain turn giddy in a whirl of impossibilities suggested by this startling declaration of independence.

"People should never take returns," said the girl. "How do we know we shall come back? A thousand things might happen. In the first place, it's very easy to be killed on a railway. Why, how fast do you suppose we are going now?"

"Sixty-mile-an-hour."

"I enjoy it! I think it's my nature to go sixty-mile-an-hour. I wish we were always flying through the air at this pace."

"So do I, Miss Lee, with my present companion."

"I told you not to call me Miss Lee; I like the other name best. Say it now, this minute."

"Beltenebrosa."

He had a deep, grave, mellow voice, capable of much inflection, which the habit of intoning had brought to a high state of cultivation. It was full of tenderness while he dwelt on the beloved syllables, and the girl could not but acknowledge its charm.

In her sorrow and loneliness she was ready to catch at any momentary respite from the dull dead pain that seemed to eat her heart away, and she found more than a distrac-

tion in the influence she exercised over her companion.

He was so kind, so considerate, so gentle and sympathetic, how could she but respond; and, after all, what did it signify? A few sweet words, a soft glance, a whisper interrupted by a sigh, these were little more than courtesies absolutely exacted by the occasion. They meant nothing in reality, and need have no result. For some natures, such are merely the small change of a currency used in daily life; for others they represent capital and interest, boundless wealth, or utter beggary and ruin. The man was playing for all he had with losing cards; the woman, so to speak, staked but a few shillings, and held a winning hand.

“At Swindon already!” she exclaimed, more gaily than she had spoken yet, as the flying express brought them into that crowded bustling station. “Yes, it’s a capital train;

if it wasn't for the cause I should like my journey very much. Oh Mr. Strange, you'll wait for me while I go and wish him good-bye!"

Her voice changed, her face fell, her whole frame seemed to collapse, and the curate felt he would willingly have sacrificed a limb to purchase the slightest mitigation of her distress.

"Do you think I would desert you?" he replied, in those full musical tones. "Miss Lee——" She held up her finger, and smiled through her tears. "Well, Beltenebrosa, I ask nothing better than to shield you from every trouble, share with you every sorrow, and, if needs must, take your part against everybody and everything!"

She gave him a kind look, and rapidly averted her eyes. Slight as was her insight into such matters, and purely theoretical, she had yet a feminine consciousness that this

chivalrous declaration must surely be tantamount to an offer. It was absurd, though provoking, that she could not help reverting to little Miss Moffat's matrimonial opinions at such a time.

"You are very kind to me," she murmured, returning gently a pressure of the hand he laid on hers. "Mr. Strange, you have a good heart, and oh, I am so forlorn, so forsaken, so thoroughly alone in the world!"

"My darling! my own, shelter for life in my arms, in my breast! I will give up all here and hereafter, for your sake!" was the answer that would have risen tumultuously to his lips, but for the application, at this critical moment, of a repressive appliance called "the break," which brought their train to a standstill in fifty yards, and reminded the travellers, even before a guard's bearded face appeared at their window, of the velocity

with which they had sped. Morally and physically, we can best appreciate the pace we have been going by the jerk when we stop.

Whether proposals of marriage are often hazarded in railway carriages, I cannot take upon me to say; but I imagine that to prove successful, they must be completed at leisure along the line, rather than offered in disjointed phrases, amidst the bustle and confusion of a station, and that station such a junction as Swindon.

Mervyn Strange would have been more than man, to finish what he had to say in the presence of a ticket-collector, two porters, and a waspish lady, who entered the compartment with several parcels, a novel, a canary-bird, and an unwholesome son. But he thought Jane Lee understood his meaning, nevertheless. When *he* looked at *her*, she averted her eyes; when *she* spoke to *him*, it was in the low-pitched voice that seems even

more confiding than a whisper. Though he anticipated her wants and wishes, pulling the window up and down a score of times between Didcot and Reading, she never thanked him in words, only with a soft shy smile, and lastly, gliding into Paddington Station, when he murmured, "How soon! How quick we have come! I hope you're not tired!" there was a world of meaning in her gentle answer: "Tired, oh no! I wish it could all be done over again."

The waspish lady entertained not the slightest doubt they were engaged, and liked them none the better, we may be sure.

They had been travelling, you see, at the rate of sixty-mile-an-hour, a pace which soon brings people to their ultimate destination. Jane Lee liked it, she said, and in my opinion was calculated to sustain such velocity with more impunity than her companion.

When Mervyn Strange helped her out, she looked and felt perfectly calm, whereas his blood was in a fever and his head in a whirl.

A drive in a four-wheeled cab through crowded London streets, even with the most charming of women, provided she be accompanied by her luggage, soon brings a man to his senses. He must shout at the top of his voice to have the slightest chance of being heard, and no romance that ever poet dreamed can be proof against the constant stoppages and interruptions of such a progress, not to mention the annoyance of bags and bonnet-boxes sliding off the front seat on his feet every ten seconds. It is but a shilling fare from Paddington Station to Jane Lee's old home in Tyburnia, yet the curate had time to recover himself, and make some attempt at a return to common sense, before the cab stopped with a jolt at the

house where poor Jack Lopez was lying dead.

The blinds were down, the door-steps dirty, the whole place looked very desolate. After some delay, the bell was answered by a slipshod woman, not strictly sober, and Mervyn Strange began to understand how delicate was the task he had undertaken, how false the position in which he was placed.

Yet now, more than ever, did he realise the friendlessness of this black-browed beauty, and, following her soberly and sadly into the house of mourning, registered a vow that, so long as he was above-ground, come what might, his Beltenebrosa should never want a champion and a friend.

CHAPTER XI.

COMPROMISE.

It is not my intention to dwell on the obsequies of a Jewish money-lender. Those of poor Jack Lopez were conducted in accordance with the impressive rites of his people and his faith. The funeral oration pronounced over his remains by a white-bearded Rabbi would doubtless have done honour to one of the patriarchs, but as it was spoken in the grand sonorous tongue that preached to the followers of Moses in the wilderness, beneath Mount Sinai, I cannot vouch for its allusions or its purport. They buried him with the proper ceremonies, and Mervyn Strange only regretted that such difference of belief as he

was the last person to overlook, prevented his reading the touching service of his own Church over this Hebrew grave.

But the curate had his hands full, nevertheless. In the first place, immediately on arrival in London, he was obliged to apprise Mrs. Tregarthen by letter that it would be impossible to return the same night, taking his chance of that lady's indignation at such flagrant disobedience, and the untoward construction she might put on his delay. In the next, he must provide a resting-place for Miss Lee, who could not possibly remain in her old home under the circumstances, and of whose fair fame it behoved him to be more than careful in such an emergency. With a discretion which deserved some credit, he suggested Miss Quilter as a proper person to receive her former pupil, and was pleased to find this proposal less distasteful to the young lady than he had feared.

Jane Lee, after a protracted visit to the solemn chamber in which all that remained of her guardian was laid out, came downstairs in that dejected frame of mind, which seems only desirous of being absolved from trouble, responsibility, and necessity for thought or action. She offered no objections whatever, accompanying the curate to Bayswater with unusual meekness, only stipulating that, when all was over, she should pay one farewell visit to the Jewish burial-ground where Lopez was to be interred.

But the suspicious intuitive sagacity of love had already taught Mervyn Strange that the moods of Beltenebrosa changed no less suddenly than the skies of an English May.

While thankful to have succeeded thus far, he by no means underrated the difficulties to come. The girl might turn round on him at any moment and demand release from a control he had no shadow of right to enforce. The

governess too might decline to receive a former pupil, under such abnormal conditions, into an establishment, of which the very keystone seemed conformity to the usages of society and opinions of the world.

Here, however, he was to be agreeably disappointed. Miss Quilter, though a schoolmistress of mature age, was, nevertheless, romantic in her tastes, and jumped to conclusions like a girl. While she folded Miss Lee in a condescending embrace, and made an elaborate curtsey to Mervyn Strange, whom she subsequently described as "a striking-looking person, and highly intellectual," she sketched out a pretty little love story, of which the couple before her were hero and heroine, taking it for granted they must be regularly and decorously engaged. Whatever embarrassments might hereafter result from these rose-coloured speculations, they seemed at least to facilitate his task for the present,

and Mervyn Strange expressed himself—as indeed he felt—sincerely grateful for the good lady’s cordiality and support. Though dignified, she was affable, and hospitably inclined besides. “It is most fortunate,” she observed, with stately politeness, “that in such an emergency I should have a spare room at my disposal. Had it been during the vacation, as you are well aware, my dear, I could have offered you a greater choice of apartments, but you will give me credit for good intentions, and take the will for the deed.”

From long practice, and close attention to the best models, Miss Quilter was able to command the choicest language, which she used with appropriate gestures. She spoke, indeed, “like a book,” and made, as was to be expected, a startling impression on Mervyn Strange.

Few of us are close observers, or how disagreeable society would become; therefore all

young men and many old consider women of mature age, in matters of the affections, to be what they are pleased to term "out of the hunt." But only watch the effect of a love-song, well executed, on a drawing-room audience, and you will never assent to such a fallacy again. Hitherto, probably, you have not taken your eyes off the young—henceforth watch the faces of the old. Over sunken cheek and furrowed brow and faded eyes, you will mark a ripple from the "long ago," moving and quivering like the circles on some calm gray mountain tarn, when you drop a stone in its breast, that stirs the sullen surface, because it has touched the cold dark depths below.

It was but the other night, I detected tears stealing down a cheek that I remembered once fresh and fair amongst the freshest and the fairest. They ran through wrinkles, and were choked by rouge, but something

told me they came up from a heart in which there was one spot left that could ache for a memory long dead and buried, yet unforgotten still. I was *not* amused, only sorry and perplexed, for it seems sad to get old without inheriting the immunities of age.

Miss Quilter had neither rouge nor—to do her justice—wrinkles, on her staid hard-featured face; but her eyes were wet while she embraced her former pupil for the second time, and offered the curate a bony hand to shake, thus conferring on him, as it were, the freedom of the establishment with her own royal assent.

“I see,” she said, in reply to his earnest and somewhat confused appeal. “Although I must withhold my approval until I am better informed as to details, this young lady may be assured of my sympathy, both in her loss and her gain.”

Jane Lee stared, the curate blushed, and

Miss Quilter, to whom the embarrassment of any false position was perfectly unintelligible, passed calmly on.

“The mournful ceremony, you give me to understand, will take place to-morrow. My dear Miss Lee—on such an occasion I feel constrained to call you by your christian-name—my dear Jane, you will, I trust, consider my house your home. This gentleman, too, Mr.—if I mistake not—Mr. Strange, will, I hope, take his meals here at his convenience, though custom forbids me to offer him the shelter of my roof under existing circumstances. Perhaps, at some future time, after a decent interval, I shall have the pleasure of receiving you both.”

Jane Lee started like a woman awaking out of sleep.

“You are mistaken!” she exclaimed. “Miss Quilter, I—I don’t think you seem exactly to understand.”

“Perfectly, my dear, perfectly. And permit me to observe, that Mr.—I believe I am correct—Mr. Strange has shown much proper feeling, and exercised a wise discretion in thus taking me into confidence. I will now beg you to excuse me while I give directions for the preparation of your apartment; and I shall hope to see Mr.—yes, Mr. Strange back to dinner at half-past six o’clock.”

The visitors looked at each other in silence, nor was there indeed opportunity of explanation, for Strange felt himself fairly bowed out till dinner-time, and Jane Lee was so completely bewildered by the excitement of the day, that she could not utter a syllable.

Friendless, desolate, perplexed, at such a moment even her strong nature seemed to give way and float helpless on the tide, accepting the future with that apathy which owes its resignation to despair.

She had been accustomed from childhood to depend on Mr. L., as she called him, for advice, assistance, and all she required; and it seemed impossible to realise that her friend and protector was gone for evermore, that there was nobody to appeal to, nobody to counsel, nobody to control her now. In this last consideration alone, she found some leavening of comfort, for the wild element in her gipsy nature always longed for freedom, chafing even under government the mildest and most legitimate. This it was that caused her to loathe the bare idea of returning to Somersetshire, and becoming once more the inmate of a respectable country clergyman's house. The domestic routine, the regular meals, the unvarying order and decorum of such an establishment, vexed and irritated her the more that she could not explain why; and although she felt grateful to Mrs. Tregarthen for her kindness, nothing would have pleased her

better than to know she was never to set eyes on that primitive and uninteresting person again.

The rector's wife, however, by no means returned this calm indifference. After the down express had arrived, without bringing her absentees, she could hardly sleep a wink, for mingled feelings of anxiety and indignation, that the receipt of Mervyn Strange's letter by next morning's post did little to allay.

"He might have telegraphed," she observed, ignoring that brevity which is no less the soul of electric communication than of wit, and which could not possibly have done justice to the penitence conveyed in four closely-written pages from the curate to his rector's wife. "Funeral or no funeral, he ought to have brought her back at the time I fixed. It is most unusual, most indelicate, most insubordinate! The only redeeming

point in the whole business is his taking her to Miss Quilter. Mr. Tregarthen, I don't think you attend to what I say!"

But the Rev. Silas could only attend to the pain in his back, that caught him at every turn when he tried to change his posture on the stool of repentance he was pleased to call an easy-chair.

"She will be home after the funeral, my dear," answered the sufferer, between his groans. "Don't distress yourself. It will all come right. I suppose he has left her everything. I wonder how much it is."

"Something handsome, no doubt," replied the lady. "People always say 'as rich as a Jew.' That's my great difficulty. If she hadn't a farthing I should know what to do."

"We couldn't well turn her out of doors, Selina?" said the rector doubtfully.

"Yes, we could!" answered Selina. "After the way in which they have both behaved, I

should not hesitate to send her packing at once, and Mr. Strange too."

"Strange is a good curate, my dear, practical, earnest, industrious; his heart is in his work."

That is to say he took much of the duty, most of the visiting, and all the trouble off his rector's hands. Many a parish priest has just such an invaluable assistant; all are not so ready as the Rev. Silas to acknowledge it.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed his wife. "There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it! He's in *my* black books, I can tell him. And now, it's time for you to take your taraxacum. My gracious! if here isn't that young gaby Paravant. He's seen me through the open window, and I can't say 'Not at home.'"

Sure enough, "Forward James" was haunting the accustomed spot. Trusting implicitly in those return tickets mentioned by the

station-master, he arrived full of confidence, and never doubting he should have an interview with his beloved, had got himself up for the purpose with peculiar care. So startling a combination of colours has seldom been seen in conjunction with a white hat, relieved by a crape, and, to use his own words, "something neat round his neck." Even Mrs. Tregarthen, who did not profess to be a judge of such matters, felt uncertain whether to admire or deride. James, however, thoroughly satisfied with a revision of his own person in the glass, had no doubts on the subject, and seemed, even to the accustomed perceptions of his hostess, more absurd, more jaunty, more conceited, and altogether more intolerable than usual.

"We've got most of it cut," was the salutation of this bucolic dandy, who considered his own hay-harvest of paramount importance to the universe. "It's a lighter crop than I

expected, but if the weather holds up I shan't complain. How's the lumbago, rector? And—and—I say—where's Miss Lee?"

On such a subject it was Selina's privilege to assume the initiative. "The rector's no better," she answered, with some asperity. "And not likely to be unless he takes the advice of people who understand nursing, and know what illness really means. If ever you have a wife of your own, Mr. Paravant, I hope you'll know her value, and mind what she says!"

"Certainly, certainly," answered Paravant, only wishing he *had* a wife of his own, if he could choose her for himself. "I should always do as I'm told, only I've nobody to tell me. And—I say, Mrs. Tregarthen, I suppose your young lady is not down yet—tired with her journey, eh? There's nothing so fatiguing, you know, as being tired."

He was blushing—actually blushing, and

the rector's wife, reading him like a book, as any woman might, did not know whether to be most provoked with herself or him, or that least docile of curates, Mervyn Strange.

It was so embarrassing not to feel sure how matters stood. If Miss Lee turned out an heiress, she would do very nicely for young Paravant; if she had nothing, she might as well marry Mervyn Strange, and thus absolve them from all responsibility in her future; but, until this knot was disentangled, the position seemed sadly embarrassing, and Mrs. Tregarthen by no means underrated the difficulties of her task.

"I don't know, I'm sure, whether she's tired or not," said the rector's wife, moving across the room to give her husband a nauseous mixture that tasted of turpentine and smelt of beeswax. "How should I, more than a hundred miles off? She's in London, James Paravant, that's where *she* is, and, as

far as I can make out, that's where she's likely to remain."

"In London!" the young man actually gasped; "and—and, Mrs. Tregarthen, don't you expect her *back*?"

"No, I don't; I never expect anything nowadays. I didn't expect she'd be off by express with Mr. Strange; I didn't expect one's own curate to fly in one's face, before one could turn round; I didn't expect the rector to sit in his easy-chair, and groan, instead of asserting his authority like a man. It's no use talking to *me* about expecting, James; blessed are those that expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed!"

He turned as white as his hat; and Mrs. Tregarthen, a soft-hearted woman enough, felt her natural indignation at the conduct of the absentees melting into pity for this poor deserted swain.

“I think I’ll go home,” muttered Paravant, looking helplessly about him. “It’s very awkward, you know, Mrs. Tregarthen, all the hay down this catching weather, and my bailiff off to Thornbury revel, of course. If you’ll excuse me, I’ll go back at once; I ought never to have come away.”

There were tears in his voice. Bumpkin as he was, the poor fellow could feel, and it would have relieved him to hide his face in his hands and blubber like a schoolboy.

“I wish I could ask you to dinner,” said his hostess, kindly; “but the rector can’t get out of his chair, and *my* dinner is only a make-believe, as you know, when there’s sickness in the house. Good-bye, James. Look in to-morrow, my dear; we’re always glad to see you, and perhaps we shall hear something more by to-night’s post.”

A small crumb of comfort, but it served

this disconsolate young gentleman for luncheon and dinner too. It was a clear case ; he had lost his appetite, there could be no further doubt now that he had lost his heart.

CHAPTER XII.

CONSENT.

“ I CAN’T accept it, Mr. Strange.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ I feel it would be wrong. I am young and inexperienced enough, but I know I must not lay myself under such an obligation to any gentleman in the world.”

“ But it is so small a sum.”

“ That is nothing to the purpose. If it was five pounds, instead of five hundred, I ought equally to say No ! ”

They were sauntering together in Kensington Gardens, a place of all others in which to talk about love, rather than money. Beltenebrosa, tall and pale, in her mourning

looked more beautiful than ever ; the curate walked by her side with the meekness of a sheep going to the shambles.

Jack Lopez had been laid decorously in the grave. His executors were making the best arrangements they could, at a startling reduction, to satisfy his creditors. Jane Lee's legacy was safe enough, but certain wise precautions of the law would delay its payment for several months. In the meantime she was without a shilling, and Mervyn Strange pressed her hard to accept the loan of five hundred pounds he had recently withdrawn from the sum of one thousand Consols standing in his name at the Bank of England, and constituting indeed his whole available capital.

"Whatever I ask you," said he, and the deep voice quivered with irrepressible pain "it is always the same. With *me* you never seem to find any difficulty in saying No !"

“Do you think it is so easy?” she answered. “How you mistake me, and how you underrate yourself! Can you not comprehend that the lips must often be taught to say No when the heart means Yes?”

He *did* mistake her thoroughly. How could he conceive that it was this girl's nature to make such an admission, and yet mean little more by it than a phrase of common thanks for some common courtesy? He was surely justified in taking her hand and catching it to his lips, after satisfying himself that nobody was looking on.

“Jane,” he murmured, “no—Beltenebrosa, *my* Beltenebrosa! Let your heart plead for me, and let your lips answer as it prompts. I entreat you to accept, not this only, but all my worldly wealth—I ought to say worldly poverty—for I have little to offer beyond such devotion as no woman ever won, no woman on earth ever deserved, but yourself.

I wonder at my presumption too. You are fit to be a queen, and I ask you to share a humble home like mine !”

“ Am I fit to be a queen ?”

In the dark eyes came a soft and beautiful languor ; it was pleasant to be so flattered, so adored—why should she not inhale the incense, and yield her senses to its sweet intoxication while she could ?

With Jane Lee, the present seemed all-sufficient ; there was that rare disposition—so capable of physical enjoyment—which seldom looks forward and never back.

“ Oh Beltenebrosa !” continued the clergyman, “ women are not blind. You *must* have seen how I love you. Have pity on *me*—if you take no thought for yourself—and say you will be my wife.”

It was a regular proposal, such as would have come up to the exacting standard of little Miss Moffat herself, and could not have

been more correctly advanced by a bishop. In a flash, she took in the whole situation—the arguments for and against the advantages and the drawbacks. That five hundred pounds weighed heavily in the balance. It was inconvenient to be wholly without money, particularly when one had no home. Yes, she would borrow his five hundred, and accept his offer. Marrying must be a future consideration; but there was something pleasant and creditable in being engaged. Miss Quilter, no doubt, would afford the sanction of her approval. The whole school would look at her with admiration, and she need never go back to the rectory in Somersetshire again.

“Do you want me to promise?” she asked, with such a bright smile as might have defeated a Dean and Chapter. “What would you like me to say?”

“That you will marry me, my darling, at once, and love me all the days of your life,”

replied the curate, believing the heaven he had so often preached of was beginning to dawn for him on earth.

“If I take this money, you will feel as if you had bought me. Five hundred pounds! What James Paravant calls ‘a monkey.’ Poor James Paravant! And do you really think I am worth a monkey?”

He felt and looked hurt. How could she speak so lightly? and was it not simply cruel to remind him of his rival at such a time? Nothing would have induced him to swear; but secretly, no doubt, with regard to James Paravant, he relieved his feelings with some clerical equivalent for a curse.

“You are worth all this world to me,” he answered, in a voice quivering with emotion. “Perhaps, for your sake, I am forfeiting my welfare in the next.”

“You must be very fond of me!”

“I am not going to tell you so, over and

over again. My darling, I love you so madly that it amounts to torture.”

“And you want to cure yourself with the only certain remedy. Some day you will wake up recovered, and in your right mind. Then you will wish you hadn’t, and say so.”

“When I do, may my tongue rot out of my mouth! When I do, may I—— But you know better. This is only to try me.”

“Then I accept the money, and as for the other matter, I suppose I need say no more than——”

“The two things are wholly distinct,” he interrupted. “Forgive me that, in my agitation, I have not kept them separate. Believe I may, I have been thoughtless, and in too great a hurry, but not wanting in delicacy of feeling. Such beauty as yours is enough to turn any man’s head, were he ten times a priest!”

She laughed lightly; not the least like a girl of twenty, engaged for the first time.

“There is no accounting for tastes,” said she. “I wonder what you can see to admire in my black face.”

“Beltenebrosa!” he murmured, pressing to his heart the slender hand she slipped within his arm; for they had reached Victoria Gate now, and were passing out of Fairyland into Bayswater.

It is something, if for ever so short a walk, to have trod the enchanted ground. Henceforth one is free of the guild, and, so to speak, a brother of the craft. Birds, and breeze, and running waters speak no longer in an unknown tongue. Those songs without words, those voices of the air that never pass the portals of material sense, tell us strange secrets, perhaps far better unrevealed, because of such learning comes suffering; and for Hope, with her illusions of pleasure, we have accepted Memory with her reality of pain.

There was a parable for all time in that tree of paradise which bore the knowledge of good and evil as its fruit.

Hungry, reckless, and disobedient, the child of man must needs pluck and eat; and be disappointed, and never know peace, nor innocence, nor fulness of content again.

Who so happy as Mervyn Strange, walking towards the City, with head up, and long confident strides, to purchase in the cheapest mart such articles of haberdashery as he felt the occasion demanded, revolving the while certain arrangements required by our paternal laws before a man can call the most friendless of young ladies his own? He was dreaming a dream that bordered on ecstasy, and would have been unalloyed happiness, but for one consideration. How was he to stand excused before Mrs. Tregarthen, and in what words of penitence, what form of special pleading, should he deprecate the anger of that

justly-infuriated dame? He could not conceal from himself that the charges she would too surely bring against him were well-founded and difficult of refutation. He had most certainly committed a breach of trust. Was there not something like abduction in the taking of Jane Lee from her temporary home, and, under pretence of a funeral, hurrying her clandestinely into marriage? What would the weekly papers say—those censors of our morals, our manners, and our dress? He shuddered to think of some withering article, couched in editorial eloquence, and holding him up to public reprobation, as “a clerk in holy orders” enacting the part of leading villain in a dramatic history of love and law. But she was worth the risk, his beautiful Beltebrosa—ay, were the risk a certainty, and the penalty ten thousand times as vile!

She too gave her mind to reflection, but hers was no simple maiden’s dream of pure

unreasoning love ; on the contrary, she was wide-awake, never more so, and looked her position in the face with calm impartial eyes. No ; she *could* not bring herself to submit to the yoke. Freedom, freedom was the boon for which she longed ; and, behold, it was already within her grasp. Five hundred pounds. Even her limited experience taught her it was but a small sum on which to begin the world. But the basis of her whole character was self-reliance ; and she never doubted for a moment that, with her voice, her courage, and her personal attractions, she could make her own way, and climb unassisted to independence, even wealth.

“Poor fellow ! he’s dreadfully spoony,” she reflected, with a pity not devoid of scorn ; “and he will be wretched when he finds I’ve thrown him over ; but it will console him to think I’ve taken his money,

and, after a time, when I send it back— which I swear to do the day the executors pay up—he will have got over the worst, and be surprised to find it hasn't killed him after all. But I don't think he'll ever marry anybody else."

She must have had some intuitive knowledge of the male heart, apart from experience— natural, inborn, like the instinct which teaches her sex, while yet in short frocks, to nurse and dandle a doll.

It was easy enough to explain to Miss Quilter that her clothes required revision, as she could not afford a new fit-out; and the good lady saw no reason why Miss Lee's boxes should not accompany her in a four-wheeled cab for such thrifty purpose of repair. She was an early person herself, and thought the girl wise to start directly after breakfast, with a promise of returning to dinner, accompanied by Mr. Strange. He would be

occupied all the morning too, and had arranged to meet her at Verey's, and take her — yes — take her to the Zoological after luncheon; there could be no harm in that!

“She's an affectionate creature, under her cold exterior,” thought the schoolmistress; wondering that her visitor, usually sparing of caresses, should have embraced her so warmly at parting, with her dark eyes full of tears. “Poor dear! No father, no mother, no friends. It's a mercy this young clergyman has turned up to look after her and find her a home.”

Mervyn Strange came back to dinner light of step and jaunty of demeanour, as became a successful swain.

“And what have you done with Jane?” was Miss Quilter's natural question, put with that heavy playfulness which people think appropriate to such frivolous occasions as betrothals, marriages, and christenings. “I

hope you haven't had a quarrel in the cab, and left her to walk !”

“Jane ! Isn't she with *you* ?”

“No. Isn't she with *you* ?”

Then it came out she had left the house at half-past nine, and neither of them had set eyes on her since.

Book II.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. DELAPRÉ.

MISS LEE'S first impulse, when she found herself a free agent, with two boxes full of clothes on the roof of a four-wheeled cab, and five hundred pounds in her pocket, was to hurry into the country and fill her lungs with free air from heaven, under the greenwood tree. Such a fancy was, no doubt, tempting, but our young lady had already taught herself to act on reason, rather than instinct, and reflected that, to enjoy real liberty for man or woman, there is no place like London.

Its crowds and labyrinths are alike favourable to concealment. There is a case on record, of a refractory husband who ran away from his wife, and lived twenty years in the next street, without detection by that ill-used and justly-incensed lady. Like the Lovel of a touching ditty, still chanted in our nurseries as "The Mistletoe Bough," and with no better success—

Unceasing she sought him, and found him not !

"Where to, miss?" asked the cabman, banging the door after she got in.

"Marshall and Snelgrove's," answered the fare, as boldly as if she meant to buy a year's outfit; but long before she could arrive at that emporium, she bade him set her down near a cab-stand, alleging that his cushions were dirty and smelt of gin. An extra shilling soothed his wounded spirit under such an accusation, and, choosing another vehicle,

she simply told its driver to go on till ordered to stop, thus, like a Red Indian, "covering her trail." At a quarter of a mile she directed him to a railway-station, where the luggage was taken out, and he was discharged. Hence, after an hour's waiting, she took a fresh departure, satisfied that at last she had destroyed all traces by which she could be followed up. There was no difficulty in obtaining quiet lodgings in a narrow street off Long Acre, and by five o'clock, Miss Lee, for the first time in her life, sat down to tea in a room of her own, as free, she told herself, with irrepressible exultation, as a bird on a bough.

I fear it modified her triumph very little to reflect on the consternation she left behind her in Bayswater and elsewhere. She laughed outright to realise Miss Quilter's puzzled face, and Mrs. Tregarthen's indignant frown. She wondered whether the rector

missed her much, and how Paravant bore the absence of his idol. Then she thought of Mervyn Strange, looked in the glass over her chimney-piece, shook her head and smiled.

Fresh, cool, and so handsome, that her landlady, who was a tolerably respectable woman, regretted not having been more stringent as to references, Jane Lee emerged next morning, prepared to carry out certain plans, the result of many hours' consideration, finally brought to perfection during an elaborate toilet, after a good night's rest.

In the first place, having sent for a morning paper, and studied its advertisements at breakfast, she secured a neat well-turned-out brougham, looking as like a private carriage as possible, not by the hour, nor the day, but the week. She might want it more than once, she reflected, to visit at the same

places, and had already learned that the world is governed by appearances, graduated on its own *ad valorem* scale: the lady on foot—the lady in another person's carriage—the lady in her own. She made her bargain, therefore, with a wise liberality, stipulating that she should be drawn daily by the same horse, driven by the same man, the latter in top-boots, the former in brass-mounted harness, with ribbons at each ear. Getting into such an "equipage," as her landlady called it, faultlessly dressed, she seemed indeed, to use the words of that observer: "None of your make-believes, but a real lady born, as did credit to the lodgings and the street!"

"I believe I could act any part, in any station," thought Miss Lee, pulling the check-string in a shabby tumble-down street. "It seems so easy to be a great lady, and to look like it, when the appliances are all to one's

hand. I should get tired of the character, too, I daresay, after a time. Change, I think, is what I really love, and a spice of adventure. Something to brisk one up, and make one look out for oneself. No. I should *not* have been a good wife for a parson. Poor Mr. Strange! He was very fond of me. I hope he's got over it. No. I don't! I shouldn't like him not to care. Yes, that's the door. Goodness! how dirty, and what a funny little place!"

It was indeed more filthy than funny, in broad daylight, and, except to the initiated, looked anything in the world but a private entrance to one of the brightest little theatres in London. The cobbler in the "Arabian Nights," who had been taken to a certain locality with a bandage over his eyes, could only make his way there a second time when blindfold again. How many haunts are there in our great puzzling city, that we find readily

enough after dinner, but might seek for hours after luncheon in vain.

With some difficulty her driver detected a bell, hung so high as to defeat the impudence of those diminutive town-bred urchins, who would have asked no better fun than continually to ring it, and run away. After some delay, it was answered by a stout, comely, well-set-up gentleman, dressed with the utmost splendour, wearing smiles on his good-looking face, and a flower at his breast.

The incongruity of this person with his surroundings struck Jane Lee as so ludicrous, that she lowered her veil to conceal a laugh.

“I beg your pardon,” said she, from inside the carriage; “I have taken the liberty of calling, to know if I can see Mr. Delapré.”

“Certainly, madam, certainly,” with an elaborate bow, and the utmost courtesy of

manner. "I am Mr. Delapré — at your service. What can I do for you? Had you not better alight, and step in?"

"He must be used to pretty women in broughams," thought Jane Lee, rather disappointed that such an appearance as hers should create no more sensation. "He doesn't seem the least put out of his way. How he shines all over—teeth, boots, and especially his hat! I wonder whether he will be equally polite when I've told him my business, and he sees me into the carriage to go away!"

Thus speculating, she followed Mr. Delapré up one flight of stairs, and down another, into a dingy passage, cool with breaths from the outer air, till, stopping to open a door with his pass-key, he made another profound bow, and motioned her to walk in.

"I wish I had a better room, madam," said he, "for the reception of so distinguished

a visitor. But when ladies come to see an actor they must put up with an actor's accommodation. Pray be seated, and—and—may I offer you a glass of wine?"

Decanters stood on the table, and beautifully cut glasses, also fresh flowers, a photograph-book, a box of cigarettes, and a drawing in chalks, half-finished. There was a bad portrait of somebody as Richard the Third on the wall, surmounting a fencing-mask, leather jerkin, and pair of foils. Jane Lee, who had never seen nor pictured to herself such a chamber, so furnished, felt interested and amused.

Declining sherry at one o'clock in the day, she calmly took a seat, and put her veil up. It was gratifying to observe that he seemed at least startled by the face thus disclosed.

"I called early on purpose," said his visitor, in the measured tone that harmonised

so well with her calm imperious beauty. "I was desirous to see you, and am fortunate to have found you at home."

"Pardon me," he interrupted, "the good fortune is mine. I would not have missed seeing *you* for more than I can say."

"My visit is purely a matter of business," she resumed, with increased dignity, "and is soon explained. I wish to obtain a professional engagement."

He had suspected it from the first, but felt a little disappointed nevertheless. It would have been such a romance, such a triumph, had this beautiful woman fallen in love with him from stalls or boxes, and driven here, brougham and all, to tell him so! These things never *did* happen, but that was no reason they never *should*. Oh! why was not life all melodrama, rather than comedy, farce, sometimes burlesque! Well, well, business must be attended to, and bread

is a necessity of existence, though we can do without flowers.

“An engagement?” repeated Mr. Delapré, whose father’s name was Dobbs. “You are aware, madam, that this is a serious matter, requiring consideration. You are not, I think, in the—in the profession. Excuse me, I see it at a glance. Have you any proposal to make? Perhaps I had better hear what you have to say.” He had dropped the fine gentleman and spoke in a business-like manner enough.

She puzzled him. Her dress, her bearing, the neat quiet brougham, above all, its driver in his top-boots, inferred neither the flashy adventuress, nor the painstaking woman, toiling for a livelihood at so much a week. Jane Lee’s worldly wisdom was already bearing fruit.

“Proposal?” she returned. “The proposal ought to come from the gentleman.

Mr. Delapré, if I tell you my private history, it is of course in the strictest confidence, and must go no farther."

He changed back to the fine gentleman—the stage fine gentleman—with marvellous versatility. "Hear me swear," he began.

"You needn't swear. It's unnecessary and profane. Your word is quite sufficient. The real truth is"—"now for a crammer," thought both speaker and listener—"the real truth is, that I—I am a married lady, and separated from my husband."

He drew his chair nearer, assuming an expression of sympathy, interest, and deep concern.

"I need not enter into all that," she continued. "Enough to say that we were unhappy together, and have agreed to live apart. Perhaps it is my fault, perhaps not."

He expressed in dumb show how impossible

it was that she could be to blame. And his visitor proceeded calmly with her confidences :

“Incompatibility of temper, and an impracticable mother-in-law. Selfishness on one side, inexperience on the other. Ignorant, innocent, and married from the schoolroom. I had better have tied my skipping-rope round my neck and drawn it tight! But that’s nothing to the purpose now.”

He was watching her narrowly. If she would only act like this before the foot-lights, he might do worse than entertain her proposal.

“Excuse me,” said he, “do I understand that you have thrown off your husband’s control, and are a perfectly free agent?”

“Perfectly.”

The command of countenance with which she concealed a smile showed no small histrionic power. It imposed on Mr. Delapré, who began to think she might be telling the truth.

“May I ask your name? I beg pardon for being so unceremonious.”

She had prepared herself for this very natural question, and bowed calmly while she answered :

“Certainly. It saves a deal of trouble. Mrs. Bell.”

“And you really wish to go into the drudgery of our profession? With all its attractions, I am bound to warn you that it is a drudgery, particularly at first.”

“I am not afraid of hard work. I like effort, mental or bodily. I am aware I must begin at the foot of the ladder, and persevere, step by step, till I reach the top.”

“The progress is slow,” he returned ; “and, with all the perseverance in the world, most uncertain. But I own I love my calling, and would follow it if I had to sing in a chorus at twelve shillings a week.”

This from a man with something like as

many thousand pounds (borrowed money) sunk in theatrical property, seemed a high compliment to the profession.

“Twelve shillings a week,” repeated Jane simply. “I suppose I should not earn more at first. I ought to tell you, Mr. Delapré, I have an independent fortune.”

He stared, but tried not to look so astonished as he felt. This was altogether a new experience. Many young ladies, handsome and ordinary, had come to ask him for engagements, but none till to-day in a private carriage, professing a noble disregard for salary.

“Mrs. Bell,” he replied, with much cordiality, “I am most anxious to meet your views. I will see what can be done. Kindly favour me with another call—say to-morrow, at the same hour. I shall hope to make you such an offer as you may think it worth while to entertain.”

Then he attended her to the carriage, with as much deference as if she had been a duchess, and stood at his door, bare-headed, while she drove away.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXPLANATION.

THE well-appointed brougham might now be seen very often turning into Whynot Street, or waiting at the shabby entrance to the Nonsuch Theatre. Its manager and Mrs. Bell were playing a game of cross-purposes. Each wanted to force the other's hand, both to conceal their own. Mr. Delapré was mystified. He could learn nothing about his beautiful acquaintance but what she chose to tell him, and, notwithstanding his knowledge of the world—his own world be it understood, lively, but limited—felt he was at a disadvantage.

The lady's appearance, he opined, would draw full houses; nor could he conceal from

himself that she was gifted with those talents which, properly cultivated and brought out, constitute an actress. He heard her sing without accompaniment, and found it difficult to judge the performance impartially, so ingratiating was the manner of the performer. Her voice, though it would scarcely fill a concert-room, much less a theatre, seemed perfectly under command, and lent itself so easily to the meaning, rather than the words of her song, that a listener could not but imagine he was taking part in it himself. He prevailed on her to read aloud from Ophelia and Lady Teazle. She was neither too pathetic in the one nor too flippant in the other, while to her eyes came dreamy madness and sparkling satire at will. He proposed that she should take off her bonnet, and let her long black hair stream over her shoulders, for Lady Macbeth, in the sleep-walking scene ; but she cut him short with a quiet refusal to make

any alteration in her toilet ; remarking that a woman should be forty at least, and stout in proportion, for the part of so energetic a housewife, particularly when she gives the henpecked Thane " a piece of her mind."

Yes, it was on the cards that Mrs. Bell might be an extraordinary success. Strange to say, this flattering possibility caused the manager much hesitation and perplexity.

Mr. Delapré was a good fellow enough ; open-handed in money matters, hospitable, well-conditioned, and, if fond of pleasure, liking to share it with his friends. But he was also a vain man ; in matters of personal advantage, an egotist to the core. Handsome, versatile, essentially *débonnaire*, he always played the ladies' parts on his own boards, and was unwilling to share, even with the other sex, that applause which it is only fair to say was freely accorded by an enthusiastic audience.

He had climbed the ladder too fast, and been spoiled by success. The height turns a man giddy at thirty, that, twenty years later, only makes him careful not to fall.

Now, if Mrs. Bell should take the town by storm, even though brought out under his auspices, he would no longer be first fiddle in his own band. No money could repay him for the loss of that position. On the other hand, if he afforded her a fair start, and she failed, the interests of the theatre must necessarily suffer by her incapacity. Besides, there were jealousies enough in the company already. In what company are there not? More than one actress of long standing was quite capable of making his dictatorship exceedingly troublesome, if she suspected her own claims were overlooked. No man in his senses voluntarily lays himself open to the attacks of a woman's spite, a woman's tongue, and a woman's wit. These

weapons, sharpened by a sense of injury, and wielded by the long experience of an actress, can penetrate the toughest hide, and would pierce a rhinoceros to the quick. In the green-room, as in the Cabinet, individual dissatisfactions create a difficulty at every turn, and he who would drive either coach to its destination, requires to study and humour the various tempers of his team.

So long, too, as his relations with this beautiful acquaintance took no definite shape, they seemed flavoured with a spice of romantic mystery, exceedingly flattering to his self-love. He liked the company to gossip and speculate, carrying tales from one to another of his adventures, his *bonnes fortunes*, his pre-eminence in a refined profligacy. Perhaps, in the whole range of dramatic character, he most admired Don Giovanni; and largely valuing his own reputation as a lady-killer, enjoyed with no little zest such a conversa-

tion as the following, held on a terrace at Richmond, overlooking the river.

Said Mrs. Trevelyan of the Excelsior Theatre to Miss Mountcharles of his own :

“Is it announced, Fanny? I think at last we may venture to congratulate him.”

“The pitcher has been to the well so often!” replied Fanny, with the shrug of her pretty shoulders that was her telling point. “If it’s broke at last, and you will send him a wedding-present, so will I.”

“What do you mean, fair ladies?” said the manager, inexpressibly gratified. “You speak dark sentences, like witches, as you are.”

“Mayn’t we congratulate you?” asked Miss Mountcharles.

“And condole with the others—the *mille é trè*? Poor things, I’m sorry for them!” added Mrs. Trevelyan, a married woman separated from her husband, and therefore entitled to commiserate.

“Upon my life, you’re too hard on me,” said Mr. Delapré. “Do I *look* like a marrying man? I appeal to Mrs. Trevelyan.”

“Frankly, you do *not*!” replied that lady, with a laugh. “But it’s too bad of you, all the same. You asked her to sit on the box. You took her out in a boat. She thinks you made the party on purpose for her, and no wonder. If you don’t propose this evening, going home, you are simply a villain with a smiling cheek, a traitor of the deepest dye, and all the rest of it. Men *are* so heartless!”

“She wouldn’t accept me,” he answered, with infinite coxcombry.

“Wouldn’t she!” murmured Miss Mountcharles. “I wonder what she expects?”

“She would make a capital Donna Anna,” whispered the other in her friend’s ear. “I wish he mayn’t have asked her to study the part. Hush! Here she comes.”

Mrs. Bell, walking along the terrace to join them, seemed as little like a broken-hearted damsel as possible. "Donna Anna may have been as dark," thought Mr. Delapré, "but I doubt if she was half as handsome; and if she had carried so fine a figure or so light a step, I think she would never have been forsaken." Then he asked her whether he had not better hurry dinner, and treated her so entirely as queen of the revels, that the company, looking meaningly in each other's faces, voted their volatile manager "settled at last!"

Now, this Richmond party was the result of reflection, and so to speak, strategy, on the part both of lady and gentleman. Jane Lee, or Mrs. Bell, as she chose to call herself, perhaps not without kindly remembrance of him who had given his evil destiny the name of Beltenebrosa, soon found that the mere keeping up of appearances as a fine

lady melted money fast, even in a lodging near Long Acre. The brougham and its well-dressed coachman alone ran away with ten guineas a week. Rich attire cannot be worn for nothing, and she had been tempted to purchase so much jewellery as made a terrific hole in her capital. The time had not arrived for payment of her legacy, and, when it *did* come, she was determined to return every shilling to Mervyn Strange, though she should have to sweep a crossing for her daily bread! At far too short a distance she could already see the end of her resources, and still her acquaintance with Mr. Delapré afforded nothing more substantial than high-flown compliments, and promises that bore no fruit. They *must* come to an understanding, and she resolved to tell him so at the first opportunity. This could hardly be done, however, on the box-seat of a coach, not to

mention the proximity of those genial spirits who crowded its roof; the manager's whole attention was necessarily absorbed in the guidance of his team.

To sit behind four horses (a very different thing from *driving* them), with only as many fingers for the same number of reins, and a whip in hand, of which the thong is inconveniently light and long, seems the correct thing for fast gentlemen to do.

Mr. Delapré, who aspired to the character of a man of fashion—which he could not be—rather than a man of talent—which he was—felt no scruple in risking the lives of half-a-dozen ornaments of the British drama up-and-down-hill over Wimbledon Common, with a scratch team, unsound and insubordinate, all pulling different ways at once. It was more by good luck than skilful driving that coach and freight ever arrived at the Castle Hotel, Richmond, to stop and set

down, ignominiously, *outside* its covered porch. .

Some of the passengers did not know their danger, others braced their nerves with champagne; all looked forward to the return journey, after an early dinner, with more confidence than might have been supposed.

In the meantime, Mr. Delapré, who handled the reins and gave the entertainment, was an object of interest and admiration to his guests. The ladies especially, with hearts softening under the influence of roses, sunshine, and cooling drinks, felt he was more fascinating than ever, and wondered how that pale woman by his side, who accepted his attentions with the utmost indifference, could look so calm and cold.

“Handsome, my dear! Not a bit of it! Too tall by a foot!” whispered little Miss Light-foot, who excelled in the dance, to Madame Shenck, a full-blown blonde, with no talent

in particular but that of looking well in all costumes. "Too dark for my taste," replied madame, in remarkably good English, "and no colouring whatever;" while Miss Mountcharles told her next neighbour that the manager's last flame looked as yellow as a guinea, and Mrs. Trevelyan vowed she was as pale as a ghost!

He continued to make strong running nevertheless, contriving after dinner, when they all went for a stroll in Richmond Park, to detach Mrs. Bell from the rest, and walk away with her, as Miss Lightfoot observed, "all amongst the deer, and the oaks, and the fern, as if they were regularly engaged!"

Beltenebrosa was in her element. Like some woodland nymph, she seemed to absorb strength and energy from the sylvan scene, and looked more beautiful than ever, while she moved light and stately through flickering

gleams and shadows, under the greenwood tree. His artistic perceptions could not but be roused to admiration, and with an intense consciousness of self-approval, he reflected on the increase of fame he must have gained in his own circle by discovering this queenly creature, and keeping her as yet so successfully to himself.

He was only waiting an opportunity to tell her something pleasant and indefinite to that effect, but they had not walked two hundred yards before she stopped short, and turned full upon him, with the following pertinent appeal :

“I wanted to see you alone, Mr. Delapré—that is why I consented to this solitary expedition. You and I must come to an understanding, without any more shilly-shallying—now—once for all !”

The tone was abrupt, the manner peremptory. Under such unfavourable conditions

even Mr. Delapré could not make love to advantage.

“We have often been alone before, Mrs. Bell,” he answered courteously, “but never in so sweet a spot. Forgive me if I hint that such a scene is more appropriate to pleasure than business.”

“You know the proverb,” she replied; “one must always come before the other, Mr. Delapré. I will be frank with you.” He bowed and made an attempt to take her hand, which was not successful. “I am at the end of my resources. The first time we met I told you I had an independent fortune. Since then circumstances have altered. I must now endeavour to make my own way in the world. You have often hinted at an engagement, but put me off from day to day. I cannot live on promises.”

“No more can I!” he exclaimed excitedly. “Mrs. Bell, shall we make a bargain?”

His whole manner had changed, and it roused her indignation to feel that an admission of poverty lowered her in his esteem.

“The man is not a gentleman,” she said to herself, “I never quite thought he was;” but she only observed aloud: “There must be two parties to every bargain. Let me hear what you have to propose.”

Something in her manner checked while it attracted him. He wondered and was provoked at his own nervousness. What was this woman more than other women that his lip should shake and his heart fail him to woo her like the rest? Courage, man! They were all the same—at least in the drama—and to be won by a *coup de main!*

He floundered and hesitated.

“I will do anything to—to meet your wishes, if, on your part, you—you will try to meet mine. Oh Mrs. Bell, it would

break my heart to think I was never to see you again. We are together too seldom as it is. If—if you would confide your future to my keeping, I would do everything in the power of man to make it a happy one. Were you unmarried I could speak plainer; but, after all, what are marriages like yours? Mere conventional forms. Do not let us waste our time in discussing such lamentable superstitions.”

She understood him perfectly, and where another woman would have been frightened or irritated, felt only some amusement and much contempt.

“Suppose I am free?” she said, with rather a bitter smile. “Suppose I have been divorced, or never married at all?”

He laughed uncomfortably. “In that case,” said he, “I could only wish I were a marrying man myself. But, believe me, Mrs. Bell, those are the most lasting attach-

ments that depend wholly and solely on the heart. You won mine from the first. If you think it worth keeping you have only to say so."

"That is not the engagement I asked for," she answered, with such scorn in her dark eyes as caused him to lower his own.

He had lost his temper and was losing his head. "A bargain is a bargain," said he rudely. "You understand my terms. Take them or leave them."

Jane Lee was proud of her self-control; nevertheless, had she been a man, she would have knocked him down then and there. She bit her lip instead, turning a shade paler than before.

"After this, Mr. Delapré," said she, "you and I must be strangers. Do not think because I am a woman I cannot take my own part and resent an injury. I shall not return to London on your coach. No,

nor even walk back with you to The Castle. Make what excuses you choose to your guests. I conclude you will prefer any falsehood to a confession that you have grossly insulted the only defenceless lady of your party!"

He protested, pleaded, apologised to no purpose. Angry and crestfallen, he returned alone to his guests, putting the best face he could on the absence of his companion, who calmly continued her walk on and on through the remotest solitudes of Richmond Park, rather pleased than otherwise with the excitement of a skirmish in which she had so entirely the advantage.

CHAPTER XV.

“ A LITTLE LESS THAN KIN.”

WHILE the “three-cornered team,” as an old ostler called it, was putting to, while actors and actresses, who were bound to be home in time for a performance that commenced at eight P.M., were discussing the merits of the entertainment, the peculiarities of their host, and above all, the unaccountable absence of Mrs. Bell, who, it appeared, was not to accompany them back to London, that lady sauntered pleasantly through the ferns among the oaks and the deer, enjoying the delights of this beautiful wilderness the more leisurely, that she determined not to return to the

hotel till Mr. Delapré and his party were fairly off. Her perfect health and truly-shaped frame hardly knew the meaning of fatigue, and it was with no sense of lassitude, but only in a delightful consciousness of freedom from the trammels and decorum of conventional life, that she flung herself down among the ferns, and watched a herd of fallow-deer crossing a sunny glade in single file, whisking an ear, stamping a foot, or cropping the tender herbage as they passed. Suddenly, quick as thought, the careless pacing walk changed to a startled scurry, and they scoured off at speed to disappear behind the nearest thicket, while Jane Lee, conscious of a shadow between her and the light, sprang to her feet with a quickened pulse, and the sense of irritation that waits on fear. A man's voice, harsh and guttural, broke the sylvan silence with a mild request, that only its dictatorial tone magnified to a threat.

“ You ain’t a got such a thing as a ’arf-pint about you, marm ? ”

The speaker was a slender, shapely, good-looking fellow enough ; very dark, very dirty, with beautiful teeth, and a most unpleasant smile. He wore earrings and a red neck-handkerchief. The rest of his attire was in rags, while feet without stockings peeped through the rents in his clumsy boots. A less desirable companion to walk with through a lonely wood could hardly have been found on a summer’s day. And for a few startled moments, the well-dressed lady thus accosted wished herself back on Mr. Delapré’s coach, wandering leaders, kicking wheelers, and all. She had plenty of courage, and soon recovered herself.

“ Half-a-pint ! ” she repeated. “ I suppose you mean beer. How can I carry beer about with me ? Do you think I keep it in a smelling-bottle ? Go on, my good man, and

don't waste your time talking nonsense. I should say you've had beer enough already."

"I ain't a good man," he answered sulkily, though somewhat cowed to find his presence created so little dismay. "And I ain't a had beer enuff a'ready. No, nor yet 'arf enuff—there! You've a got the price of a pint about you somewheres. Come, hand it out!"

She would willingly have paid for a pint, or even a gallon, to be quit of him, but reflected that, to get at her silver, she must produce a little *porte-monnaie* containing all the remnant of her store, and thus offer an inducement to robbery with violence on the spot. In one rapid glance she satisfied herself no assistance was at hand; in another, she scanned the tramp's slight small-boned figure, and calculated that if it came to a trial of strength, she might be able to hold her own.

"You'll get nothing from *me*," she said

firmly. "Come, my man, it's no use. Drop it, and walk on!"

"Walk on!" he replied; "yes, I'll walk on along o' you. It's not such a honner w'en all's said and done! Wot, you won't, won't ye? Then I'll just make ye!"

Oh for the gleam of a park-keeper's shiny hat! Not a living creature was in sight, not so much as a fawn or a rabbit, only the birds sang joyously in the dark depths of woodland; and the broad palmated ferns grew high enough to screen any lawless deed of outrage or rapine.

He took her by the wrist in a grip of steel, scarcely to be expected from those taper fingers; but her blood was up, and she made her white teeth meet in the brown dirty hand. He wrenched himself free, drew a clasp-knife from his pocket, and opened it with a frightful curse.

Her courage failed her now; she believed

her hour was come, and put both hands up to screen her eyes, entreating him to spare her life—only spare her life—and take all she had!

Instead of committing murder then and there he shut up his knife and stared in her face with unfeigned surprise, muttering broken sentences in some outlandish tongue she had never heard before. By degrees he seemed to recover his composure, and presently burst into a hearty laugh.

“You ain’t got no Romany,” said he, “not a word—not even a morsel of patter; but you’re one of *us*! I ought to have spotted you at first. I might have knowed it without seeing of it marked in your skin. Only a Purrum or a Kaulo-Camlo could be so black and so comely. Ah! the Gorgios may bluff and bounce, but their women can’t hold a candle to the Lovels and the Lees. Yes, yes; there you stands, my sister! A true, thorough-bred Romany!

And to think I've been a looking for you nigh fifteen years, and found you without a candle at last!"

"Your sister!" she gasped; "and you've been looking for me! What do you mean?"

He laid his slender finger—tawny, unwashed, yet so like her own—on the arm that her straggles had bared to its elbow, and pointed out the tiny blue initials to which she was so accustomed, she hardly knew they were there.

"See here," said he. "Ever since I was a child of five, I have been taught to look for a woman who carries that mark on her wrist, and bring her back to her kindred and her tribe. I am a Lee, and so are you; but it's no matter for that. When Shuri Lee left the camp, she carried a baby with her, marked as you are now. She never came back. I was but a little lad, and yet I remember how Fighting Jack took on. He

hadn't been married long enough to make it easy for him, poor old chap! Ah! it would be different now, may be; but his hair might never have turned so white, if he hadn't lost wife and child all in one go! Well, we've been a seeking the babe ever since, us Lees, the whole of the tribe. Look ye here. J. L., that's Jericho Lee. I'm marked too, same as yourself. We ought to be pairs!"

She turned giddy, and for a moment faint. The old oaks seemed to reel and stagger all round. Then came the strange reaction that follows every startling experience, the unaccountable sense that it is neither so new, nor so extraordinary, nor so overpowering as it ought to be. That in some state of existence, something of the same nature has occurred to us before, that we are a little disappointed, and that, however wonderful the revelation, we had expected more.

"Do you mean you know me?" she asked,

trying to speak calmly. "Do you remember my mother? What was she? Who am I? Tell me all you can."

"You are a true Romany," was his answer. "What the Gentiles call a Gipsy, and so am I. We have a proverb: 'A Romany never lies to a Romany, nor speaks truth to a Gorgio.' You may believe what I tell you."

"You asked for beer just now," she said, putting her hand in her pocket, with some vague idea this new acquaintance ought to be humoured and conciliated.

"Not from *you!* Not from *you!*" he repeated, earnestly enough to betray the strength of a temptation he thus overcame. "Gipsies take no toll of each other. I am in rags while you are in satins, but perhaps I could show money against you now."

With that he pulled a handful of gold and silver from his pocket, and bade her

"take what she would, the Lees were always ready to befriend each other."

Such an offer could not but inspire confidence. Beltenebrosa felt all her courage had come back, while her curiosity was keenly stimulated by this strange adventure.

"Where were you going when you found me here?" she asked. "Do your people make a practice of robbing every unprotected woman they find in a lonely spot?"

"I was going to our camp," he answered, ignoring the last part of her question. "It is not an hour's walk from this place. Come and see the gipsies in their home. We will give you a sister's welcome."

She hesitated. It would not be dark for hours. The days were surely past for kidnapping grown-up people, and the temptation was strong to study in their own haunts the race with which she had always felt so un-

accountable a sympathy, to which she began to think she might be near akin.

“I will come and pay you a visit,” she replied loftily. “No, do not fall behind. I am never ashamed of my company; and I want you to tell me all about your people and your tribe.”

So this strangely-matched pair walked on through Richmond Park, in the golden glows of the summer afternoon; and by the way each imparted to the other such details of their respective lives as roused a keen interest in both. Jericho, inheriting from his southern ancestors many refined instincts common to the Arab, the Gipsy, the Red-Indian, and the Patrician of Western Europe, felt strangely fascinated by this being of a superior order, who was yet a kinswoman, and belonged to his own race. He had never seen anyone so beautiful, and of a beauty, moreover, to which his eye and taste were trained. Dark

brows and locks, white teeth, and delicate features were common enough amongst the women of his tribe, but never till to-day had he looked on gipsy charms enhanced by civilised culture and rich attire.

Let poets say what they will, "beauty unadorned" can never hold its own with beauty owing its dressmaker a bill that "carries over" three figures to the other side.

Jane Lee, too, scanned, not without a certain contemptuous approval, the agile form and dark expressive face of the youth who had so frightened her at their first acquaintance. While he talked on—teaching her their pass-words, and affording much curious information on the peculiarities of the Romanies, as she must now learn to call her kindred—she could hardly believe this pleasant, well-spoken, imaginative companion was the same man who had seemed to her an hour back

but an ill-conditioned tramp, thirsting for the vulgar gratification of beer.

“You know a great many things,” she observed, with condescending surprise, not lost on the keen-witted gipsy; “why, where did you go to school?”

His dark eyes sparkled, and his smile showed a handsome set of teeth; but there was something of dignity in the carriage of his head and the wave of his arm while he replied :

“Look round, my sister, as far as your eye can see, as far as your thought can fly; you cannot even then compass the teaching of a school the Romany goes to day by day, all day long, and all night too. He learns to read in the blue sky above, to write on the wide earth below, and to calculate in the number of fools he gets a living out of at every village fair. Yes; the Romany never leaves school like the Gentile. I

myself have to-day got the lesson by heart
I have been learning all my life. See, there
is the smoke rising from our kettles ; welcome,
my sister, to your own people and your
real home !"

CHAPTER XVI.

“ A LITTLE MORE THAN KIND.”

JANE LEE started back at a sound like thunder, which proved to be nothing more than an up-train on the London and South-Western Railway, passing directly overhead. Sheltered by one of its most imposing viaducts, the gipsies had taken up their quarters for the night. Savoury odours rose from a score of kettles, and slender wreaths of smoke, escaping into the air, attested that they extracted from the smallest supply of fuel the largest amount of fire. In the whole encampment there was but one caravan—a wooden structure like a Noah’s Ark on wheels. The other dwellings consisted of rough sticks

and tattered blankets, arranged with such skill as to form picturesque and tolerably comfortable tents. The gipsy, like the Chinese, holds in respect the wisdom of his ancestors, and, in his mechanical contrivances, refuses to depart from customs handed down through a hundred generations. He affects a residence to-day, on an English heath or common, of the same shape and texture as that which served his forefathers under the Shepherd Kings by the fluctuating waters of the Nile.

Picking her way through charred sticks, broken pans, bundles of rags, and dirty children, Jane Lee followed her guide to the caravan mentioned above, at the door of which, up three wooden steps, on a rush-bottomed chair without a back, sat its proprietor, taking the refreshments of evening air, and strong tobacco out of a short pipe, in alternate whiffs.

This personage was so remarkable in ap-

pearance as to merit description. He seemed long past the prime of life, but tough and vigorous still, standing about five feet nine in height, on a pair of legs and haunches fit to carry a Colossus. His shoulders looked narrow, but his girth of chest was deceptive and enormous. His neck was short, and very thick, his jaw large, firm, and somewhat underhung, which gave his face the resolute yet honest expression of a mastiff. He had long muscular arms, tapering to a round wrist, and small thick hand, with knuckles less than usually prominent. This member, which it seemed more natural to call "a fist," looked capable of inflicting the severest punishment without receiving injury.

Fighting Jack, indeed, had been in his day a terror to the London prize-ring, and one of the hardest hitters on record. Even now, though more than fifty years of age, after a rough life, and much sorrow, with

much drink to drown it in, he liked to boast that, "though he warn't quite so handy on his pins, nor yet so saucy with his return as he used to be, it took a fairish good man to stand up to him still!"

With all his ruggedness of feature, there was something picturesque in his appearance, that impressed Jane Lee not unfavourably. He seemed more like the chief of a warlike desert tribe than the head of such a gang as this, tinkering saucepans for trade, and robbing hen-roosts for spoil.

Without betraying the slightest surprise at her approach, he bent on her a piercing look from under the black brows that so contrasted with his snow-white hair.

"Don't you go for to speak to him till he speaks to you," whispered Jericho. "There's one thing he can't a-bear, and that's a woman's tongue."

But Jane Lee was not to be intimidated

Walking boldly to the wooden steps that fenced his throne, she looked him full in the face, and asked :

“Are you the master here ? I’ve come to see your people, and expect you to show me round the camp.”

He was fairly staggered, testifying his emotion by smoking in shorter and fiercer puffs than before, while he turned wrathfully from the young lady to her guide.

“What’s up now ?” he demanded. “Who the —— is this, brother ? And why the —— have you brought her to *me* ?”

“I have found her at last, uncle,” replied the younger gipsy respectfully. “Show him the marks, sister. Speak up, and say how Jericho was after you all these years, and brought you home at last.”

Fighting Jack trembled from head to foot ; the pipe shook between his broad strong teeth. He came tottering down the steps, and took

the young lady by the hand, swaying to and fro like a man in drink.

"Tell me the truth," he growled fiercely, while he loosed the spotted kerchief round his thick brown throat. "Look ye here, you *dursn't* lie to *me*, neither of ye. I'd do for you both, as sure as you stand there alive!"

"It's no lie, uncle," pleaded Jericho, trembling like a leaf. "Show him your arm, sister, and have done with it."

Turning back the sleeve of her dress, she pushed down a costly bracelet that girt it, and stretched her full white arm for inspection. Fighting Jack stared and gasped, without a word. Then he turned his head away, and put the ends of his dirty neckcloth to his eyes.

Presently he looked kindly in her face. "You're welcome, my dear," said he; "you'll stay here to-night—in the old man's crib, you understand. Oh, you *must*! You shall have

the best of everything—linen sheets, and black tea four shillings a pound—gold, my dear, if you'd eat it. Turn your face this way. Ah! you're like your mother, you always was! I'll go in and get ready. I won't be a minute. Don't you stir a finger, I'll be back directly."

Then he mounted the steps, and disappeared through his wooden door, like the cuckoo in a cuckoo-clock.

Fighting Jack was no exemplary character, far from it, not even a decently respectable member of society, but he possessed some redeeming qualities, of which not the least extenuating was, a constant heart, that could love one woman in a lifetime, and be very tender for helplessness of any kind, particularly in a child. Whether this unreasoning and protective fidelity, like that of a mastiff or bulldog, may or may not have some affinity to the combative instinct, also common to these animals, that refuses to acknowledge

defeat, I am scarcely physiologist enough to determine, though, in my own experience, I can call to mind more than one example of such heroes, only half brutalised by their heroism, whose courage sometimes sank to ferocity, but whose kindness more often rose to the highest pitch of generosity and self-sacrifice. Fighting Jack married a woman he loved very dearly. It was the great pleasure of his life to deck her out in the gaudiest of clothing, the costliest of ornaments. The gipsy's wife, he liked to boast, could wear as heavy jewellery as the squire's lady, paid for, too, every carat of it, with her husband's money. He knew no better, poor fellow! He thought a woman preferred dress and decoration to everything else on earth, and he would have given, he *did* give, his very life-blood to indulge her with what she liked. The mending of kettles and making of rush-bottomed chairs are not lucrative branches of

industry, even when supplemented by petty larceny in the matter of linen and fowls, but in the company he affected, Jack Lee soon found that his fists would gain him a profit he could never hope to earn with his fingers, and that a first-class boxer might afford to dress "his missus"—for that was his ambition—no less extravagantly than a lord of the land. So he went into training, fought his maiden fight triumphantly, finished up his man in thirteen rounds, and pocketed a clear fifty pounds with hardly a scratch. Proud and happy was the winner when he chucked the battle-money, every shilling of it, into his wife's lap; prouder and happier still when she burst out crying, and entreated him, with her arms round his neck, never, no never, to run such a risk for her sake again! Not that she cared for him as he did for her—the true secret, perhaps, of his infatuation; but what woman could remain unmoved by so touching

a display of daring and devotion, particularly when thus crowned with success ?

Then his backers discovered he could take punishment, to use their own expression, "like a glutton," so they matched him with a celebrity on whom the talent laid three to two, as having a stone the best of the weights, and being hitherto unvanquished. The fight created extraordinary interest, and was attended by many people who would have been sorry to see their names in print. The "dark one," as the sporting papers observed, wore his adversary down by dogged courage, correct fighting, and superior condition ; leaving the ring sadly mauled, indeed, and almost blind, but once more a winner, "after an hour and three-quarters." Again to quote from the sporting papers : " Ding-dong, hammer and tongs ! A fair, old-fashioned, stand-up fight, and a splendid exhibition of true English pluck ;" which last encomium, as the conqueror

was a gipsy and the conquered a Jew, must be accepted for what it is worth.

So Fighting Jack became a celebrity also, and it was soon time "to put the strings on," and make a profit "the other way up," by a certain dishonest arrangement that losers call "a Cross." His patrons trained him, therefore, to enter the ring for another contest, giving him strict injunctions at the last moment, and one hundred incontrovertible reasons, to sell the fight. He earned his money fairly, though much against the grain, laying himself open to the severest punishment, and doing his duty, as he understood it, with a loyal turpitude that sprang from a warped sense of honesty and gratitude to his knavish employers.

His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

His wife might have worn satins and velvets at a guinea a yard after that, but

Jack never more faced his man in a roped ring; for within six weeks of this last disgraceful performance, the execution took place at which she lost her baby and her life. It was months—years—before the prize-fighter could hold his head up again.

To use his own words: "He got it so heavily he couldn't come to time!"

The man's heart was a large one, and perhaps, though ashamed of his weakness, and never admitting it but in his cups, he felt pain in that region more keenly than would many a sufferer of weaker fibre and less resolute will. That metaphor is old and well-worn, but apposite nevertheless, which describes the oak as rent and shattered by a gale, while the sapling stoops and bends to rise again unhurt.

Fighting Jack was a blackguard, no doubt; but not a bad specimen of his class—frank, daring, with many characteristic opinions,

sufficiently primitive, and a strong determination to have his own way.

This quality he demonstrated on the spot. "Yes, you must share the old man's crib," he repeated, descending his wooden steps, after a brief absence within the caravan; "and the old man's supper, too, my pretty lady. Ah! I can't hardly bring my tongue to call you daughter. Now, who'd have thought it? Blessed if I don't begin to judge as it isn't all happy-go-lucky, heads-and-tails, just as the numbers come up! Well, nothing was too good for your mother, my dear, and there's nothing here in the camp, nor out of it neither, that shall be too good for *you!*"

He would take no denial. It seemed to him only natural that he should be obeyed. With a certain courtly hospitality, that belonged to his gipsy descent rather than his pugilistic education, he ushered Jane Lee

into his dwelling, giving her a hearty but respectful welcome, and bidding her, so long as it suited her convenience, to consider this wooden house her home. The sun had already set, the protracted twilight of an English summer's day was glimmering into darkness. How was she to get back to London, even if she knew the way, and where else could she find shelter; supposing, and this seemed most unlikely, that the gipsies would permit her to leave their camp? She must make a virtue of necessity and remain here all night. It seemed no such hardship. On the contrary, perhaps from hereditary instinct, perhaps from feminine curiosity, the girl felt interested in her surroundings, and anxious to become more familiar with a wandering life that seemed the very ideal of that freedom for which she had often longed. Jericho, too, was a new experience. How could he be so ragged, so dirty, yet look so like a gentleman?

Why did he move so gracefully, yet speak such vulgar English? And what was this secret influence that in the twinkling of an eye had elicited a romantic and mysterious character from a mere low-lived tramp asking for beer?

Fighting Jack, naturally enough, puzzled and impressed her exceedingly. Altogether, Jane Lee found so much to think of, that when Jericho brought her supper to the top of the wooden steps she couldn't eat a morsel. The repast was no less anomalous than the mode in which it was served. He handed her a silver drinking-cup and a wooden platter. On the one smoked a savoury stew, in the other bubbled Devonshire cider, cooled in a spring and sparkling like champagne. A clasp-knife and spoon of horn were flanked by a silver fork without crest or cipher, a table-napkin of fine linen lay neatly folded for her use, and the salt-cellar consisted of a hideous saucer, cracked to the rim and

clumsily mended, but which any fancier of old china would gladly have purchased at its weight in gold.

Looking round, the furniture of the little hut seemed equally incongruous. There were silken hangings inside the door, and a velvet curtain at the narrow window. There was even a diminutive dressing-glass, and an attempt at a toilet-table, supplied with a tin basin, a paper of pins, and a tortoise-shell comb. "No brushes," thought Jane, with comical dismay, "and no soap!" In a recess stood the bed, a wooden contrivance much too frail to carry Fighting Jack, and that seemed, moreover, not in the best repair. It boasted, however, linen sheets, perfectly clean and dry, a pillow with a lace edging, re-sewn at the corner where it had once been marked, and a patch-work quilt of the brightest colours, rather dirty, but soft, warm, and comfortable enough.

Presently a knock at his own door announced a visit from the proprietor, and Fighting Jack, still smoking, looked in with a radiant smile.

“Make yourself at home, my pretty,” said he, hiding his pipe in the palm of his hand. “Where *would* you be at home, I should like to know, if it warn’t here? Liberty Hall, this is, for *you* leastways. Feed, fill, and call for more. Why, you haven’t eaten scarcely a scrap, nor drank scarcely a drop! My service to you, my dear, and a hearty welcome!”

He put the silver mug to his lips—obviously from politeness—for he set it down again little emptier than before, while the girl thanked him for his care, and assured him that her supper was all she could desire.

He listened, with a sad wistful look on his stern old face, and pondered silently, without moving an eyelash, for some seconds after she had done speaking.

"It's her voice," he said, with a little catch of his breath ; "it's her very words, and the pretty trick she had with her hand. Let me call you daughter, my dear, and kiss you on the forehead this once, for I never thought to see the like of my Shuri above-ground again!"

She bent her cool white brow to meet his lips, and the old prize-fighter kissed it reverently, religiously, as devotees kiss the relics of a saint.

He was back half a lifetime, in the prime of his strength and manhood, happy in the one ennobling influence that had raised him to a thinking being from a mere courageous beast. For one moment it flashed across him that he might have made a better use of his chances ; that if he had taken up some respectable trade, and worked at it steadily, he should now be able to offer this noble creature a worthier home ; the next, his knowledge of human nature, acquired in all classes of society, as

seen at their worst, suggested that she might have been more estranged from the humble mechanic than the daring adventurous gipsy; and he smiled grimly to reflect that, with all its evil, no woman could listen unmoved to the recital of such a life as his!

“I won’t intrude on you no longer, my dear,” said he, after a pause, in which he stared at her with steady unconcealed admiration. “Oh, I haven’t forgotten my manners, nor her as larnt me! You get ready for bed, my dear. I’ll send in Nance—a handy lass she is, and a Lovel, but she couldn’t hold a candle to *you*. Ah! show me one of them that can—Kaulo-Camlos, Petulengros, Hearnese, Marshalls, and Stanleys—one down, t’other come on. She shall make you a cup of tea—my Shuri always relished her tea—and you lie down, my dear, it’ll do you good. If you feel strange or lonesome, sing out, and I’ll answer as true as a clock. I won’t be far off.

I've laid my blanket and plenty more 'baccy under the steps. And—and—look ye here, my lass, if you've got such a thing as a bit of a prayer in your mind, give it mouth. I can't think of one myself. I haven't offered to say mine for nigh upon twenty years !”

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE OF THE FAMILY.


I HAVE an old friend who professes strong objections to staying with some relatives, on the ground that they treat him "like one of the family." In his case, he protests this unceremonious welcome means second-class fare and second-growth claret. In my own experience I have sometimes observed the same advantage taken of too close an intimacy. The fatted calf is killed for a stranger, but husks are considered good enough for the familiar friend. As regarded her entertainment, Jane Lee found nothing to complain of; but on awaking, after a sound night's rest, she discovered that she was in so far

considered "one of the family," as to be no longer a free agent, and Fighting Jack's hospitality in his own camp was of that arbitrary and inconvenient nature which firmly refuses to speed the parting guest.

For a few bewildered seconds she could not remember where she was, nor how she got here, but when she recalled her scattered ideas, and rose to dress, she was first indignant, then frightened, to observe that her own garments had been taken away. In their place was laid out a picturesque costume, of the same style as that in which Nance attended on her the night before, though of brighter colour and more costly material. Presently that tawny handmaid, who seemed to have been on the watch, appeared with cold water in a pitcher and hot tea in a mug. Perhaps acting under orders, the girl answered questions in such a gibberish of real Romany, mixed with thieves' patter and

tinkers' English, that the visitor could not understand a syllable, and finding it impossible to regain her lost apparel, was obliged to make the best of the garments provided instead.

With the aid of Nance, whose nimble fingers could accomplish most tasks of dexterity, from pea-and-thimble to picking of pockets, she was soon in her new dress, and could not dissemble her satisfaction at its effect, even as seen in a cracked mirror, six inches by three. She felt she was embarked on an adventure such as had often been talked of amongst her school-companions at Bayswater, and it seemed none the less to her taste, that it bore some affinity to the mystifications of a masquerade. But she had scarcely time to admire herself, before a sudden jolt of the whole tenement took her off her feet, and she became aware, with much the same feelings as those of its



occupant, when the horse is put to a bathing-machine, that her caravan was in motion, and the troop of wanderers in all probability on the march.

When she looked out, it was over the back of a tall white horse, plodding between leafy hedges, fresh and fragrant in the dews of a summer's morning.

Jericho, smoking his early pipe, walked by the shaft, and bade her "Good-morrow" with as little emotion as if they travelled together every day of their lives.

"Where are we going?" she asked, "and where is the master?"

"We doesn't call Jack Lee 'Master,'" answered the gipsy, "we calls him 'Patron,' and so must you. As to where he is, why, where he is always at this time o' the morning, *back*; and we're a-goin', as we goes always at this time o' the morning, *forward*."

“Stop the horse then,” she said, “I want to get down and walk.”

“I dursn’t,” he returned, looking over his shoulder. “The Patron said as you mustn’t.”

Was she a prisoner? Had this queer old man, who professed to be her father, really a design to carry her off, and in these days too? It seemed impossible. Yet that iron face of his looked capable of anything. She felt a good deal frightened, but not without some relish for the excitement of such a situation.

“Jericho,” she whispered, in that soft tone she had already discovered none of the other sex could hear unmoved, “we didn’t know each other yesterday, but to-day you are my oldest friend here, and bound to be on my side. Tell me, what have they done with my things? Can you get them back?”

“Hush!” he answered. “Stow that, and

speak fair. You don't know the Patron. Give in to him, and he'll stand by you through thick and thin. But I wouldn't try to cross him—not if I was you. Ah! you ain't a-seen him yet with his frill out. You'd never forget it if you had."

"Why, Jericho? Is he so terrible?"

"Terrible! I believe you. Now just look here: it was but last week, a Gorgio down in the swineherd's country wanted to sell him a *gry* (that's Romany, sister), well, a horse, then—such a vicious devil you couldn't get a bridle on it. The dealer swore black, and all black, it was as quiet as a lamb; but when we went to examine the beast, it charged at us, open-mouthed, like a dog. Well, sister, the Patron drew himself together, and let out. Ah! there's no living thing can stand up to one of Fighting Jack's left-handers, and the crittur went down like a log. 'You've killed my horse,' says the

Gorgio, 'and I'll give you in charge,' says he, putting his hand out to take and collar him. 'Drop that, brother,' says the Patron; 'I can stun a horse, easy enough,' says he, 'I might *kill* a man!' and the dealer, though he was a tall black-whiskered chap, twice the weight of any gipsy, was glad to stand a drink and say no more about it. I've told you afore, sister, and I make bold to tell you again—don't go for to cross the Patron. It's as much as your life's worth. Steady! Here he comes."

Fighting Jack, smoking as usual, now made his appearance, and accosted his visitor with a deference she hardly expected, yet could not but mistrust, as inferring a consciousness of mastery and perfect control over her movements. To inquiries concerning their destination, he would only answer vaguely that they were travelling West. When she demanded what had become of

her clothes and belongings, he assured her they were in safe keeping and would be restored at a proper time. For the present, he said, she must be content to remain in the caravan, wearing the costume of her tribe. She must make some allowance for a father's fancies. How could he bear to part with her again on the very day after he had recovered his long-lost child? She would find a gipsy's no unpleasant life. They had neither flocks nor herds, house nor land; but they owned all out-of-doors; they possessed whatever they desired that belonged to their neighbours; and they never need want for ready money so long as every passing year produced its annual crop of fools. A young woman might do worse than take her share of so noble an inheritance, casting in her lot with the Romanies and old Jack Lee!

“Do you mean to keep me here a prisoner?” she asked, with as much dignity

as the jolting caravan permitted, for the road was rough, and the white horse plodded on regardless of its ruts. "Do you think I am such a child I don't know the laws of the country? Do you think I have no friends to miss me, and track me out, and hand over you and your people to be dealt with by the nearest magistrate. Come, Mr. Lee, a joke is a joke, and I've humoured you thus far; but I could have you transported for keeping me here against my will!"

He looked at her with sincere admiration. "You're a true Lee," said he affectionately, "down to the heels of your boots; and I'm proud of you! But when you bounce about lagging of your old father, my dear, you make him feel more like a laugh than a cry. Say you're joking now. You wouldn't do it if you could. Not you!"

"This is a very impracticable old gentle-

man," thought Jane, whose coolness seldom deserted her, "and threats seem only to amuse him; but as for my staying amongst these people, with their tawdry finery, their tattered blankets, their fleas and their dirt, I must make him understand it's preposterous, and that without delay!"

"Patron," she said, "because I'm a girl——"

"Won't you call me 'Father,'" he interrupted, "just for this one'st?"

"We'll see about that when we are better acquainted. In the meantime, because I'm a girl perhaps you think me a fool, easily frightened, easily deceived; and you believe you can keep me here, like a bird in a cage, till it suits your pleasure to let me out?"

"I could if I would, easy enough, pretty. But that's not my way with them as I love. Now, steady, my lass; let's talk sense a bit. Business is business."

He refilled his pipe, and clenched it unlit between his teeth, as was his custom, when bringing his mind to bear on some knotty point. No two men could be more unlike, but watching the kind thoughtfulness of his expression, he reminded her of Jack Lopez, and the girl's eyes filled with tears.

“Business is business, my dear,” he repeated, “and that's but another word for money, set it up which end you will. Us Romanies is forced to do without, the best we can. But when all is said, a pound's worth of silver means meat, drink, and baccy, a bit of fire to cook with, and a blanket to sleep in; that's about the size of it, and wot's that but man's life? Now, look ye here, pretty; you came to us in silks and satins, chains and laces, like any lady of the land, and in your little pocketbook, or what-not, I counted two five-pound Bank of England notes, four golden sovereigns, half-a-crown, and a threepenny

bit. Oh, don't you make no mistake ! I've got it here safe, and I wouldn't wrong you, not of a brass farden ! That's fair and square enough."

"It is if you hand it back."

"Don't you be afraid. It's a sight safer in my pocket than yours. Now look ye here ; a man doesn't live to be over the half-hundred, in the ring or out of the ring, but he larns to put two and two together. I counts your money careful, and I says to myself : 'Jack,' says I, 'a young girl, not if she was a banker's daughter, doesn't carry fourteen quid two-and-nine about her for pocket-money. This here young woman,' says I, 'have left her home for reasons,' says I, 'and brought all her plunder along.' I ain't so fond of waging as I used to be, but I'd wager a gallon now as I ain't very far out !"

He waited for an answer, and she frankly admitted that fourteen pounds two shillings

and ninepence represented the whole of her worldly wealth.

“ I knowed it ! ” said Fighting Jack, triumphantly ; “ and that’s one reason as I was so pleased to think you’d found your own people and come home at last. You’ve been brought up a lady, a real lady ; oh, I can see it with half an eye ! Some day, pretty, you’ll tell the old man how, and where, and why. But what’s a lady with no more than fourteen quid to keep her ? Why, I’ve made as much in a morning buying and selling of a lame horse ! No, you’re better with me, under your father’s roof, as is natural—though it’s more liker a carriage nor a house, and none the worse for that ; far better here than loose and lone on the wide world, with empty pockets and such a handsome face as yours ! ”

Then he lit his pipe, and proceeded to smoke in thorough enjoyment, as having exhausted the argument, and settled the whole matter to their mutual satisfaction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARKET VALUE.

REVIEWING the situation, with a calm courage, probably inherited from that formidable champion Fighting Jack himself, Jane Lee decided that, for the present, she must let things take their course, and make the best of her captivity with the Egyptians, till it should please the Patron, in his wisdom, to set her free. For a few days the change of scene and habits was exciting enough. In her gipsy costume, laughing with Jericho, helping Nance to cook, or listening to the old boxer's tales of adventure, she seemed to forget her own identity, and could sometimes almost fancy herself as true a Romany in character as she had

now learned she was by birth. The other gipsies treated her with a deference exceedingly gratifying to her vanity, while the Patron's care kept out of her sight and hearing such details of their wandering predatory life as could shock her sensibilities, or offend her finer taste. She was, so to speak, a princess in the tribe, and received the homage due to a member of the royal family from all.

But after a few days the situation became irksome in the extreme. By the time she had mastered the names of some score of vagabonds, male and female, who formed the gang, she discovered that, with all the beauty of face and form neither dirt nor tatters could conceal, with all their inherent pride of birth, and professed superiority to the rest of mankind who lived in houses, the men were without valour, the women without discretion, while honesty seemed an unknown

quality, and the honour proverbial even among thieves was stretched, on occasion, to a most treacherous elasticity. She grew very tired of the life and the company, only waiting, with the resolute persistency of her character, for an opportunity to wrench herself free from both. To escape had seemed at first an easy matter, but day by day she became more convinced that a captivity is none the lighter because imposed by affection, and prison locks are none the less secure because the gaoler turns his key with a paternal smile.

There were two lawless natures in the troop, who sunned themselves with unfeigned enjoyment in her presence, to whom her departure would seem as a withdrawal of the very air they breathed.

One of these was Jericho. The young gipsy had been much struck by the courageous demeanour that so resisted his attempt at

robbery, in the solitude of Richmond Park. And a subsequent acquaintance with the heroine of that adventure served but to deepen an impression so favourably begun. Jane Lee, with her proud carriage, soft voice, and refined bearing, was a being of superior order, when compared to the Joans, Nancies, and Madges, who had hitherto constituted his experience of womankind. She moved among them like a queen, and while they hated her cordially in consequence, not a man in the tribe but felt honoured by her notice, and seemed to stand an inch taller on his bare feet, for a look and a smile from the Patron's haughty visitor, who, wise in her generation, took care to be sparing of both. Jericho, conscious that she noticed him more than the others, felt proud of a distinction that encouraged certain vague hopes he had begun to cherish. He was one of the Lees, he argued, like herself. Their

families had intermarried for generations, holding themselves, indeed, as the congenital branches of the oldest family amongst a people to whom Rohans and Montmorencies are but mushrooms of yesterday. Why should he not aspire to make this paragon his wife? Had he not been the lucky one of the whole tribe to light on their lost princess? Were they not marked with similar initials on the arm? There seemed a fate in it! The same stars that watched over royal dynasties no doubt protected a gipsy's destiny; and when Fighting Jack had quite done with life and leadership, who could show a better right to stand in his shoes than his kinsman Jericho, married to his daughter Jane?

Meantime, the first step was to obtain the Patron's consent. And he fairly trembled to think of the outbreak so ambitious a suit was likely to provoke; for what was his own sense of admiration, and even attachment, compared

to the old man's infatuation for this glorious creature, who had come at last to brighten the end of his life, like a fine sunset at the close of a foul day?

Fighting Jack seemed never tired of watching his long-lost child, content to sit and stare at her, pipe in mouth, by the hour together, silent, and perfectly happy only to know she was in sight. A man of few words at all times, and prone, I fear, to strike sooner than speak, and swear sooner than pray, he watched her every look and gesture, with something of a dog's mute vigilant fidelity, that anticipates the very wishes of its owner.

If Jane Lee had asked for anything unattainable without its commission, there is no crime at which the Patron would have hesitated, to gratify her desire. Yet now, perhaps for the first time, he began to regret his antecedents were not of a different nature,

and that he could meet his daughter's eye with a clear conscience, as having been an honest, as well as a brave man, all his life long.

Youth is too much given to look forward, yet, strangely enough, it never seems to anticipate the time when rest and retrospection constitute the pleasure of existence; when it is delightful to stretch the weary limbs in an arm-chair over a sea-coal fire, or under a sunny wall, while the failing mind floats on an ebbing tide of memories and reflections, far back into stirring scenes that shift, and waver, and vanish like the shadows in a dream. There is a complacent smile on the old man's face while, marshalling his phantom troops, he passes in orderly review the dangers, contests, and triumphs of his prime. How petty now seem jealousies and heart-burnings that formerly embittered the very bread he ate. How gladly would he

offer the well-remembered rival a hand that once itched to take him by the throat. Was it worth while to watch and wait, to strain and strive for the wisp of laurels that came at last to his share? And how could he ever have been such a fool as to pine and sicken for those his stature was too low to reach?

When halfway down the hill, even long before entering the dark valley that leads to the foreign land, how happy must he be who can look back on a journey in which trips, and stumbles, and errors have been atoned for by an earnest desire to keep the straight path, a steadfast resolve, in spite of sinking strength and miry ways, to carry his burden faithful to the end! Jack Lee felt, rather than knew, now, when it was too late, that his course had been without a compass, his efforts fruitless, his success a fallacy, and his life a mistake. All the more did it seem incumbent on him to provide a safe

refuge for this long-lost daughter so unexpectedly restored. It needed far less knowledge of the world than he had acquired to warn the old prize-fighter that a handsome young lady, with wild blood in her veins, could have no more dangerous enemies than a wilful disposition and an empty purse.

“If you was to make your lucky some fine morning, my dear,” said he, with an air of profound wisdom, “and mind ye, our people has eyes as can see through a milestone, pretty nigh, and ears to hear a watch tick a’most after it’s run down. But no matter for that, if you was to up-stick and away, back among the Gorgios, as is nateral, why, where be you to find a home? that’s wot beats *me*. I asks you where’s? No, no, my pretty. It’s a tale as has been told too often, but it’s always the same finish. A handsome hearty lass, as thinks she knows best; a bare cupboard; a hard try to get

work, and to do it after it's got. Ah! I've knowed plenty as yarns their bread by both, and I tell ye, the needle takes more out of 'em than the spade; then hunger, and strong black tea, and perhaps, a mouthful of gin. I've been downhearted myself, and I'm not going to deny but what liquor warms the blood and keeps the mind easy, right, or wrong, till it's died out. So the gal gets a sweetheart, maybe a swell, maybe a counter-jumper. 'And now,' says she, 'I've all *I* wants.' Only women has queer fancies, and she can't be off wondering, at odd times, whatever she should do if he was to take and leave her! It makes her think of them lights flashing in the river, and the long level bridges, quiet and empty, with the clocks a-strikin' to tell her it's time to be out of this, and go somewheres else. It turns her sick, poor thing, and she takes a 'three of gin' this turn, and doses of it down 'cause

it does her good. Wot's the use, it all comes about at last just as she thought it wouldn't. A long wait, a short letter, plain-spoken and unkindier than none ; a empty pocket, and, what's worse, a empty heart. Not a morsel of bread, only a bottle of spirits with the cork out, and we needn't ask who stands treat. Then the whistling shop, good clothes turned into drink, and a thirst as *won't* be quenched, contriving how to get more. So it comes to the saloons, and the streets, and maybe, the river after all ! ”

His voice was thick and hoarse, a tear hung in his shaggy eyelashes, and he lifted her hand reverently to his lips. The girl, touched by the affection of his tone, felt impelled to give him her entire confidence, and imparted a piece of information she knew the next moment she ought to have withheld. It was a false move, but once made, could not be taken back.

“You need have no fear for *me*, Patron,” she said. “I’m not going to starve, and I’m not going to take in needlework, and I’m not going to drink gin. I shall have five hundred pounds of my own in a few weeks. That’s enough to keep a young woman out of mischief, I hope !”

“Five hundred pounds !” The Patron literally gasped. She was precious enough before, but the refined gold seemed gilt now, and the lily painted to some purpose. “Five hundred pounds !” he repeated. “That a daughter of mine should have five hundred pounds ! Why, it’s a purse for a queen ! I won’t ask you how you come by it, my dear, but however do you mean to spend it all ? Pigs, poultry, sheep, cattle, horses, you might set up at once, and do such a business as would drive every other gipsy out of the trade. I could turn the money over in six weeks with New Forest ponies alone !”

She laughed at his eagerness. "I have a better plan than that," she said. "I must get it first though, and I ought to go to London; but we're travelling the other way, surely."

He lit a fresh pipe. This inheritance, no doubt, made his daughter an exceedingly valuable prize, but he could quite understand that she might slip through his fingers during the formalities necessary for its acquisition; while, on the other hand, if he kept the goose in too close captivity, the golden eggs might not be forthcoming at all. The result of his reflections was that he ought to hold on for the present to the auriferous bird, and he resolved to take Jericho into his counsels, giving that willing auxiliary strict injunctions to counteract all attempts of the prisoner to escape.

He might have been more puzzled had he known that Jane Lee's intention was to return the whole sum to Mervyn Strange, at some

future time, when she had obtained by its aid a firm footing in society ; and though she sometimes speculated as to whether she was not bound in honour to fulfil her engagement, should it be impossible to liquidate her debt, I fear she came to the conclusion that rather than substitute the former payment for the latter, she would repudiate both !

After such a confession, the gipsy's guest found herself free to leave the caravan at such intervals as she chose, and, ignorant that she was only the more closely watched, rejoiced in this comparative release. The Patron seemed anxious to please and humour her, judging discreetly enough that, even from the strictest custody, a girl worth five hundred pounds might find fifty ways of flight, at ten pounds a bribe. He knew his people well, and thoroughly appreciated their devotion to their chief—a romantic and honourable fidelity, incorruptible by silver, but hardly proof

against gold. It was imperative, he thought, to make her captivity agreeable, and thus neutralise her natural inclination to escape.

She was allowed, therefore—always in gipsy costume, for the Patron himself kept her original silks and satins under lock and key—to go abroad with the others, on such expeditions as entailed no danger of collision with the rural police, and always under the care of Jericho, who assumed her guardianship the more readily that the Patron had thought well to drop certain hints regarding the market value of his charge.

“She mustn’t slip through our fingers, lad,” said the old man—“neither yours nor yet mine. She’s as handsome as paint; you can see as much without a candle. But you mind what I tell ye, she’s better nor that—she’s as good as gold!”

CHAPTER XIX.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE.

JANE LEE, with her natural vivacity of character, thoroughly enjoyed emancipation from the jolting caravan, in which she had spent nearly a week without change. She had grown tired of the Patron, Nance was no longer an object of curiosity, nor Jericho, though he thought differently, of interest. The other gipsies she had "reckoned up," as she called it, in the first eight-and-forty hours; and without some fresh excitement, some active occupation, she felt as if she must die from sheer depression of spirits, and disgust with her uneventful life. Inheriting the roving tendencies of her race, she longed

for change of scene and surroundings, from the same instinct that prompted them to strike their tents, and shift their encampment, week by week. It was with no slight sense of hope and excitement that she learnt from Jericho the Patron's intention to attend Swansdown Races with his whole gang, squatting on the edge of the moor, in a wild corner, called "Nobody's Nook," where three counties met, and whence he could detach and recall his foraging parties so conveniently as to keep them, in a measure, "on the windy side of the law."

"It's the pleasantest jaunt of the whole year," said Jericho, "and the most profitable. The constables dursn't interfere, because as the one can't get liberty to cross over the other's border. There's sticks for the gathering, and no questions asked, rabbits half as big as sheep, feeding out by scores, and not a keeper nearer than five mile. Two days' racing, and

twice as many fools as you'd find at Kingsbury or Hampton. Nance took three quid dukkering alone, last time, besides a note as she borrowed unbeknownst from a farmer's breeches-pocket. It was a country note, and we dursn't go for to change it—but that's neither here nor there."

"'Dukkering?'" asked Jane Lee. "What do you mean by dukkering?"

"Summat as you would do better than most, sister. The Gorgios calls it 'telling of fortunes.' You goes smiling up to a gentleman on horseback—them's mostly the softest with such as you—and you looks so sweet, and speaks so kind, half turning your head away, and laying of your hand on his horse's neck, that he outs with a quid, just for the pleasure of putting his fist in yours, while you gammons him about his bold looks and his handsome face, and the dark woman not a hundred miles off, nor yet ten, as is break-

ing her heart for him, because as she comes of a different race, and it's as much as her life's worth for them to be seen together, when she's forbidden to think of him, even in her dreams. And so it is!" added Jericho, kindling suddenly into a blaze of passion, as unexpected as it seemed uncalled for. "I can't a-bear it, sister, and I won't! If I was to catch you carrying on like that with the best Gorgio as ever sat in a saddle, I wouldn't care, not if I was to swing for it next 'sizes, but I'd knife him as sure as I stand here—don't you make any mistake—and maybe you too!"

She turned on him a calm look of astonishment, even ridicule, that made him feel exceedingly uncomfortable and thoroughly ashamed. They were walking alone, somewhat in advance of the troop, having determined to spare the old white horse by ascending on foot a steep interminable hill, that

offered fresh views of rich and varied beauty at every turn. Below lay wide extending plains of field and forest, meadow and cornland, wooded knolls, dark ravines, and sunny slopes, losing themselves in a dim haze, lit up by the gleams of a winding river that shone out at intervals in threads of light below the distant hills. Underfoot they brushed the wild red heather, bursting into bloom, and overhead a clump of fir-trees, dark and majestic as cedars, stood out against the calm blue sky, laced with level streaks of cloud. The gipsy's whole being was stirred by the scene, and he felt that now or never must he lay his heart open to his companion, and set his future on the cast, or, as he expressed it, "go in a perisher and take his chance."

"I'm a fool, sister," he said, with something like a blush on his brown face. "But it seems to me, as you makes fools of us all! I hadn't no call to let out like that, and I

asks your pardon free. I'm the last as would want to catch you tripping, the very last, a-cause I knows too well what would come of it. Ah, we keeps it out of our minds with drink and what not, but it's a fearful matter is death?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, turning pale, for there was something ominous in his earnest manner, and stern, though pitiful face.

"You ought to know," he answered. "But, though you're a Romany born, you've taken your teaching from the Gorgios, and there's a many things wherein us is wiser nor them. We holds by our own laws. Maybe you thought as we hadn't got none. I shouldn't wonder if you didn't believe as you was free to go where you would, and marry who you liked. Never such a thing!"

She started. Her captivity had not yet appeared in so slavish a light; but the com-

bative instinct was roused, and she answered defiantly: "Who's to prevent me?"

"Not me! I hopes from my heart!" he answered, with a shudder; "and yet needs must, whether or no, if I got the office regular from the tribe. But it wouldn't come to that; never say it. You're not the sort as would take up with a Gorgio."

"Why not?"

"Sister, shall I tell you why? Yes. It's only fair you should know, and you won't bear *me* ill-will. Them laws was made hundreds and hundreds of years before you and me was born. When a Romany lass—no matter whether she's a Rawny, a chief's daughter, such as you, or a come-by-chance, like Mumping Madge—thinks well to forget her tribe and her nation for the sake of a stranger, there's no two ways about it—she must never come back no more!"

"She wouldn't want to, I should think."

“Ay, but she mustn’t be seen to disgrace us neither. So we brings her case before our own beaks, and they gives sentence according.”

“And what is the punishment?” She tried to speak carelessly, but her voice faltered, and her heart sank in spite of herself.

“We cast lots who is to do the job ; shaking beans in a bag, maybe, or pulling straws out of the Patron’s hand. Him as gets the devil’s number clears out of camp and goes to work at once, tracking and following of her up, no matter where she’s hid, till he comes within arm’s length at last.”

“And then?”

He pulled his knife from its sheath, ran his finger along the edge, and made as if he drew it across his throat. The pale face, the glistening eyes, told their own tale. No spoken denunciation could have seemed so terrible as this vague suggestion of murder in dumb show.

She was fairly intimidated, but summoned all her courage to dissemble the truth.

“I don’t suppose even death will deter a woman from having her own way,” she answered lightly. “However, I no more want to marry a Gorgio, as you call them, than a gipsy ; so it makes little matter to me. Come, we have had enough of horrors ! Tell me something about the races, the booths, the shows—all the fun of the fair.”

Then Jericho launched out, nothing loth, on an enthusiastic description of the enjoyments he anticipated from the next three days. Swansdown Races, it appeared, constituted a Western Saturnalia, established, it would seem, on behalf of a rustic population, a trifle thirstier than Londoners, with equal tendencies to vicious indulgences, but less shrewdness, and a greater aptitude to be gulled by palmistry, ring-dropping, the confidence trick, and other flagrant impositions

practised by rogues who keep sober, for the cozening of fools who get drunk.

Such a gathering was the gipsies' harvest. Encamped on Nobody's Nook, a bare edge of moor, tolerably dry in all weathers, where fuel was to be had for the stealing in certain adjoining coppices, owned by an absent squire, they established a basis, as it were, from which they could carry on their dishonest operations with as much comfort as success. No keepers, indeed, meant no game, but there were hen-roosts tumbling to pieces on every side, curs chained to empty casks, that barked furiously, but never woke their master till the thieves had got clear off, and, better still, handsome farmers' daughters, happy, healthy, and ignorant, never grudging a bit of bacon and a mug of cider to the plausible gipsy, buying tawdry tinsel at the price of virgin gold, and crossing their own toil-worn palms with silver, to be pocketed by swarthy

fortune-tellers, for the promise of an undeclared lover, a prospective husband, and an eventual family, seldom less than ten. Even without the races, such a primitive neighbourhood was after the Romany's own heart; but when these indigenious advantages came to be enhanced by a two-days' gathering, that collected from far and near an agricultural population, taking scarcely another holiday in the year, it is easy to conceive how large a share of the besotted workers' earnings went into the pockets of the persuasive idler, and how, after Swansdown Races, the Lees and Lovels who attended were sleek and saucy, and flush of ready money for at least a month.

“There's business to be done too,” continued Jericho, warming to his narrative, “for a chap as knows a horse when he sees him, and sees him when nobody else don't know as he is looking on. It's a good game, sister—you wouldn't peach—you dursn't—so there's

no call for telling of you. 'Twas but this time two year, I was on the ground afore sunrise, looking after a wire as I let drop out of my hand by chance overnight, at Brimscombe Brake, by the back of the course. I was afraid a rabbit might have got hung up in it and hurted hisself. I'm fond o' dumb critters, and I'd a-taken of him out, you may be sure. Well, I warn't a-thinking of anything particular, when I see two swells, as far as I could judge, for it was barely light, standing right in the middle of the track. 'Hold on a bit, Jerry,' says I to Jericho—that's me, sister—'and keep dark—this here ain't no business of yourn,' so I dropped down among the heather, soft and quiet as a mouse. Presently I hears the blowing of horses half a mile off, and a beat of hoofs, even and regular, the way them thorough-breds gallops, when they stretches out. Ah! I've always said as 'twas cruel

hard lines to lag a cove for *choring a gry*. Horse-stealing's against the law—that's right enough—but think of the temptation, sister, and gipsies is but flesh and blood, after all.

“Well, nearer they comes, and past me like a flash. I could just tell one from t'other. Three of them there was. The first and the last seemed larger than the middle one, more growed-out-like, but *he* was the beauty. Dark chestnut, with one white foot in front—oh! I took notice—and an eye in his head almost as bright and soft as your'n, sister, and as big again.”

Jericho, losing himself for a space in memories of this paragon, Jane Lee showed sufficient interest in his tale to ask: “Did he win?”

“I couldn't make sure. He was gaining on the first, when they passed my hiding-place, and the third horse, he couldn't come a-nigh, try how he would, but wot I heard

was good enough for *me*. Says one of the swells, turning round to light his weed, and chucking of the match into the back o' my neck, he stood that close: 'A very satisfactory trial,' says he. 'Never was extended,' says he, the way them Gorgios bluffs amongst theirselves. 'Why, it makes him five pounds better than the old horse, at the weights, and I don't see how he can lose.' T'other was a younger chap, with bright eyes and a smooth face. 'Lose!' says he, 'don't talk of it,' says he; 'I've gone for the gloves this time. Let's get back and have some breakfast!'

"I'd had mine—I never starts without—but I was home before them, I'll lay a wager. And the Patron, he didn't cut no time to waste neither. In less than an hour he'd rigged hisself out in a brand-new suit of broadcloth, clean collar, starcher, and a tall hat. If he'd kep his gloves on and his

mouth shut, blest if you'd a-known him from a parson or a beak. Off by rail, too, first-class, and everythink. Oh, he didn't do it by halves! That's the best plant as we've ever been in, before or since. If I could take such another morning walk, only once in the year, I'd travel in my carriage and pair, like a lord of the land."

Her interest was flagging. "I suppose you all backed the handsome chestnut," she said, with a yawn, "and he won?"

"Better than that," he answered. "He laid agin him free. First at evens, then at two and three to one, till the very morning of the race, and he never come to the post. The blacksmith lamed him someway, d'ye see, putting of his plates on so bad as he couldn't turn round in his box. That blacksmith warn't asked to lift a hammer for the stable agin, and hadn't no need. He's hard up, I daresay, by now; but I seen him

myself, driving a trotting match for a hundred sovereigns, money down, the week before last. He's a kinsman of the Patron. That's how it come about, very like. A Lee always stands by a Lee."

The intricacies of his narrative were lost on his listener, who was deep in her own thoughts. Swansdown Races, if she could profit by the opportunity, seemed to promise a fair chance of escape. Turning matters over in her own mind, with characteristic rapidity, she formed a plan that she thought might afford liberty of action in detaching her for a time from her comrades; and, if nothing better came of it, would at least furnish such amusement as should take her for a few hours out of herself. Jericho was obviously in a communicative mood, and she determined to get out of him all the information she required.

CHAPTER XX.

PALMISTRY.

“I OUGHT to take my share of work, no less than play,” said she. “What was it you told me I could do, Jericho? Dukkering, I think you called it. I should like to try my hand.”

“Can you read the stars, sister?”

“Can you?”

“No; I can't; nor nobody else! That's the bare truth. Dukkering's different. It's no use humbugging of you.”

“Well, it's not very difficult, I daresay. How am I to begin?”

He assumed an air of importance befitting

so lofty a subject, and entered at once on a scientific explanation.

“Of dukkering, my sister,” said he, “there is three kinds. Us Romanies practises all, but the Chorodies—mean low scum, as their very name tells you, and the Kora-mengre, hawkers and criers of stinking fish, and such like—never tries it on but with two at most. This here knowledge, as teaches us to peep behind the curtain that hangs afore next week, was larnt us by our fathers, who were larnt by *their* fathers, hundreds and hundreds of years back, in the beginning of time. The first, and the oldest way of all, is to tell a fortune by the stars, but it won’t take with the Gorgios now as it used. Perhaps they thinks our right to the stars no better than theirs; nor you can’t always get a look at them neither, even on summer nights; so it’s easier to fall back on the four suits, or the palm of a man’s hand. I could larn you

the first in ten minutes, if so be as I'd got a pack of cards in my pocket; but the daddles is always ready, and I'll show you the three lines of fate—so as you'll never forget them again — in less than three minutes."

He took her slender hand in his own, and turning the palm uppermost, traced with his brown finger the light creases, scarcely perceptible, on its delicate surface.

"This here, sister," said he, "is the Line of Life. See how it travels right athwart from finger to wrist, and loses itself at both ends, because a man can't tell where he came from, when he was born, nor where he is going when he dies. That's wot beats us, Gorgios, Romanies, and all! There's the Line of Wealth, very faint it is, and uncertain, but cutting deeper as folks grow older. Just like money comes with years to them as lays their mind to it, and saves up against the time as they

won't want for nothing but the price of half a day's work with a spade. It's a line, this is, as you mustn't make much account of with young folks, gals in particular; them won't hear of money or money's worth, alongside of love; but the farmers, especially the fat 'uns, likes to be told they've got it strong! Then here's a mark as you show plainer than t'others; this means going from place to place, foreign or what not. When you've a brown-faced curly-haired chap to deal with, you may tell him as he's bound to make a long voyage; and if there's rings in his ears, you're safe enough 'n warning of him as his lawful wife is looking out for him this minute across the sea; but you won't go for to make mischief, you may say, if there's any petticoats by, for he'll be generous to the poor gipsy like a free, brave, open-hearted sailor, and she wouldn't bring tears into the blue eyes or the black, according to the

company, as is a watching of him now with a sore heart along of his handsome face. He'll out with a bit more silver, you may be sure, for fear as the gipsy should peach, though he'll laugh right out, and swear as he don't believe a word, and only does it for the sport! There's another yet, sister, going across from the thumb. It's called the Line of Fate, this is, and you must be very careful how you work it when you've to do with old folks, or even the middle-aged. If it's short and shallow, on a soft young hand like your own, you may out with it plump, as this is the sign to teach how long they has to live. Soon as it runs in to meet the Line of Life there's no more to be said. The candle's burnt out, and the game's up. I'd pass it over, if I was you, with the toughest customers, and stick to the money or the sweethearts. Nobody thinks themselves so old as they can't do with plenty of both, and you needn't

believe in these no more than you like. It's different with the Line of Fate."

He spoke in an altered tone as though, like other priests of a false superstition, he had discarded all but the most impossible and preposterous tenets of his creed.

"Then you think I have a long time to live?" said she, inspecting the lines on her own palm, with an interest of which she felt half-ashamed.

He caught the slender hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Sister," said he, looking round to make sure they were not observed, "when *your* time comes, I'll ask no better than to take my chance with you for good and evil. If you and me take our leap in the dark together I don't care when it is nor where."

Jane Lee, I need hardly observe, at this stage of my narrative, was one of those women, fortunately rare as they are dangerous, who

consider they have a prescriptive right to the homage of all mankind. They seem to believe that the other sex is created, like the lower animals, for their especial service without thanks or remuneration, and that, in no case, are they to admit the justice of a proverb, which insists on the same sauce being served with the gander that is appropriate to the goose! So long as a man could be of the least use, she felt justified in availing herself of his time, intellects, money, everything he chose to offer. If he was such a fool that he must needs fling his heart after the rest of his possessions, so much the worse for him! She didn't want it, she didn't ask for it, but she looked on it in the light of an umbrella, for instance, politely offered during a shower, a temporary convenience to be opened, made use of, and returned with thanks.

Women of such temperament, if they care

to try, usually attain considerable social success. They skate on thin ice indeed, but it seldom gives way under their light careless tread. They play with the sharpest instruments, but avoid cutting their own fingers, and warm themselves comfortably at a fire that scorches more earnest natures to the bone. They have just enough feeling to take an interest in the game. Were they perfectly callous there would be no pleasure in playing, and can gauge the fever raging in the hearts of their victims, by an agreeable sense of warmth and vitality in their own. To give them their due, they are exceedingly loath to come down from the high ground whence they elect to offer battle. When they do, their defeat is irremediable and complete.

The Amazon of history is said to have cut off her right breast that its shapely outline might not hinder the drawing of her bow, but

our modern Penthesilea, whose low-cut dress would hardly permit the concealment of such an eyesore, practises a less obvious mutilation, and leaving her bosom to sink and swell before an admiring world in all its natural softness, attains a deeper immunity by hardening and scarifying her heart.

“Do you mean you like me so much?” asked Jane Lee, in those half-tender half-mocking tones that so bewitched her listener. “Why, Jericho, you always call me your sister, and you haven’t known me much more than a week!”

“A week! What matter for that? Does it take a week for a man’s eyes to be blinded, and the very heart scorched up in his body? I tell you, that time when I dropped on you in Richmond Park I felt how it was going to be—the first five minutes was enough!”

“But you don’t think ladies—I mean, you

don't suppose women are so impressionable? I wouldn't look at the best man in the kingdom unless I'd known him at least a year and a day."

"That's a match! Shake hands on it! In a year and a day I'll come and put you in mind of what you said this minute. You'll forget, likely enough, but I won't. It'll be meat and drink, clothes and firing; ah! the very pith and marrow of life to me from now till then."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime there's nothing on this mortal earth as you can ask that I won't grant, free. Says you: 'Jerry, I wants this or that;' no matter what—a velvet gownd, a gold ticker, jewels for your ears, or your fingers, or your hair—and Jerry, he answers: 'Right you are.' If 'tis a lagging matter, more nor that, though Jerry should swing for it, silks

or velvets, laces or diamonds, you won't need to ask again !”

“ You say so now, Jerry, and think so, perhaps ; but supposing I wanted you to do something, and the Patron told you not, how would it be then ? You like *me*, I daresay, but you're afraid of *him*.”

“ Try me !”

There was a world of faith and devotion in the dark eyes that met her own so honestly. She pitied him, and could not help showing it.

“ Poor Jerry !” said she. “ I suppose I ought to believe you. At least you deserve a trial. Now you *can* do something to please me, if you will.”

“ Speak up, sister, it's got to be done, right or wrong !”

“ Then you must persuade the Patron to let me go with you to the races. I am so tired of that caravan. I have scarcely been

out of it for an hour till to-day. I want to see a little life. I want to hear people speak English again, instead of a gibberish I cannot answer nor understand. Will you explain to the Patron? Do you know what I mean yourself?"

"I suppose I do, sister. You must come to it gradual. Like a singing-bird as is caught and shut up in a wicker-cage—he takes and puts a sod of turf in at first, so as it shouldn't think it's never got to be out o' doors no more. You've seen the Romanies in their camp, now you'd like to know how we carries on when we's afield—you want's to take the rough with the smooth."

"Exactly, Jerry. You understand me already. Now promise you will manage for you and me to start off together early the first day of Swansdown Races, away from all the others, we two by ourselves. What

I want is a holiday, and not to be accountable to anybody but you."

He looked thoroughly happy. Such an expedition, so carried out, seemed all that was most enjoyable in the world.

"I'll try to persuade the Patron," said he. "But he's liker to say yes for you than for *me*. I don't know what to think, though, of your going out on the dukkering lay; you're not used to it, you know."

"Oh Jerry! that will be half the fun. Besides, I don't want to shirk my share of the work, and I'll bring back all I make, fair, honest, and above-board, like—like—a real Romany."

She smiled in his face, so handsome, so mirthful, so exquisitely provoking, that Jericho lost his head, and tried to pass his arm round her waist.

For some secret reason, his effrontery

seemed to excite amusement rather than indignation.


“You are in too great a hurry by a year,” she said, disengaging herself with a laugh—“and a day. A bargain is a bargain. Here comes the caravan. Don’t forget your promise, Jerry. Good-night!”

The Patron’s opposition to their scheme was less violent than had been anticipated.

Fighting Jack felt in the position of the gentleman who was presented with a white elephant. He had attained the possession of something very valuable, no doubt; but its care entailed trouble, responsibility, and expense. Though he considered the best of everything not a jot too good for his daughter, and grudged no outlay on her behalf, he would have liked to see her more grateful for the comparative luxuries with which he surrounded her; more alive to the incon-

veniences she caused him in the way of politeness, sobriety, and an occasional clean shirt.

“I’m not sure I didn’t do as well without her,” thought the Patron, reflecting on the amount of strong drink he usually took during Swansdown Races. “But it would never do to let her slip through my fingers now. Dash it! wot a handsome lass it is! And five hundred pounds! It’s a vast of money. Them good-looking ones is mostly bad to drive; but when a gal’s got five hundred pounds, it gives her a kind of a right to have her own whims and her own way. I must humour the lass. My Shuri was always at her best when I humoured of her; and if the wench really wants to go playing of her high jinks at these here races, why, go she must. I’ll see she’s well looked after, but Jack Lee’s not the man to say her nay!”



So it was settled at night-fall, after the important business of encamping, that the young lady should try her luck next morning, in appropriate costume, as a gipsy fortune-teller, under the tuition and guardianship of Jericho Lee.

END OF VOL. I.



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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions.

2. The second part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions.



